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The Fair Education Alliance is a coalition of approximately 200 of the UK's leading organisations from business, education and the third sector. The aim of the Alliance is to create a fair and equitable education system, ending the persistent achievement gap between young people from the poorest communities and their wealthier peers through collaboration and by influencing policy.



Unbound Philanthropy is an independent private grantmaking foundation that invests in leaders and organizations in the US and UK working to build a vibrant, welcoming society and just immigration system.

About the Education Policy Institute

The Education Policy Institute is an independent, impartial and evidence-based research institute that promotes high quality education outcomes, regardless of social background. We achieve this through data-led analysis, innovative research and high-profile events.

Education can have a transformative effect on the life chances of young people, enabling them to fulfil their potential, have successful careers, and grasp opportunities. As well as having a positive impact on the individual, good quality education and child wellbeing also promotes economic productivity and a cohesive society.

Through our research, we provide insight, commentary, and a constructive critique of education policy in England – shedding light on what is working and where further progress needs to be made. Our research and analysis spans a young person's journey from the early years through to entry to the labour market.

Our core research areas include:

- Benchmarking English Education
- School Performance, Admissions, and Capacity
- Early Years Development
- Social Mobility and Vulnerable Learners
- Accountability, Assessment, and Inspection
- Curriculum and Qualifications
- Teacher Supply and Quality
- Education Funding
- Higher Education, Further Education, and Skills

Our experienced and dedicated team works closely with academics, think tanks, and other research foundations and charities to shape the policy agenda.

This publication includes analysis of the National Pupil Database (NPD) <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-pupil-database> The Department for Education is responsible for the collation and management of the NPD and is the Data Controller of NPD data. Any inferences or conclusions derived from the NPD in this publication are the responsibility of the Education Policy Institute and not the Department for Education.

This work was produced using statistical data from ONS. The use of the ONS statistical data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the ONS in relation to the interpretation or analysis of the statistical data. This work uses research datasets which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates.

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Foreword: Education Policy Institute

High attaining pupils in England generally perform very well by international norms – reaching ‘world class’ standards. Our big challenge in English education consists in the long tail of low performance, which is highly correlated with poverty, special education needs, some aspects of ethnicity, and other characteristics of vulnerability.

At the Education Policy Institute, our work is heavily focused on helping policy-makers and practitioners to use research evidence to identify effective strategies for closing these gaps. As part of our mission, we regularly publish an Annual Report, which seeks to measure the learning gaps, for different pupil groups, for different phases of education, and in different parts of the country. This helps us to understand what progress is, or is not, being made, and where the greatest challenges appear to be. It may also help us to identify some of the drivers of changes in the gaps, so that corrective actions can be taken.

One achievement of EPI researchers is to present these learning gaps in a rigorous but easy to comprehend way – in terms of the months of learning that different groups of vulnerable children are behind the average of the rest of the pupil population. We also seek, over time, to refine our analysis, so that we can achieve a better understanding of learning gaps and their drivers.

This year we provide more detailed information about the persistence of poverty, and how this may be affecting changes in the disadvantaged learning gap, as well as how it can explain differences across the country in the size of these gaps.

This report also includes, for the first time, our estimates of the learning gaps for Looked After Children and children with Child Protection Plans.

We will continue to develop our analysis in future years to help secure a deeper understanding of what is behind these learning gaps, and to consider how these may most effectively be closed.

The latest data which are contained in this report are for 2019. Since then, the COVID epidemic has had a profound impact on English education, and everything we have so far learned about education during the schools’ lockdown suggests that the response to the health crisis will have had a particularly adverse impact on poor and vulnerable children. The gaps we report here may therefore already be much wider this year.

In any case, this year’s report is a wakeup call for all those who want to see educational outcomes and opportunities improved for our poorer and more vulnerable children. We report that after a long period in which some progress has been made in closing most gaps, this progress has now stalled. Indeed, even before COVID struck, there were signs that the disadvantaged learning gaps were about to widen. That is why this year’s Annual Report and its associated analysis is so important.

As ever, we welcome comments on the contents of this report.



Rt. Hon. David Laws, Executive Chairman, Education Policy Institute

Foreword: The Fair Education Alliance

Each year we report on how the country is fairing in terms of tackling inequality in the English education system. This year the message is clear: **the gap will never close without systemic change.**

EPI's research gives us an in-depth analysis of the persistence of poverty over a child's school life, the geographic variations of the attainment gap, and how factors like special education needs and ethnicity intersect with disadvantage. This data provides a nuanced understanding of the inequalities present in the education system, and the progress, or lack thereof, in closing these gaps.

The data available for this report is from 2019, pre-dating the Covid-19 pandemic. The data shows that the country was already facing significant challenges - the gap had widened across early years, primary school and secondary school, and specific groups were increasingly left behind, including:

- **Persistently disadvantaged children** (on free school meals >80% of their school life) were on average 22 months behind their more advantaged peers and this has not improved since 2011;
- **Looked after children** were 29 months behind other children; and
- Gaps in attainment widened significantly over the past decade between **Black Caribbean children/children from other black backgrounds** and children from other ethnicities.

It is likely that these problems have only been compounded by the adverse impact of Covid-19 on children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Yet, with crisis comes opportunity. The situation has drawn back the curtain and society are more aware of the deep and growing inequalities. The situation highlights the urgency and need for cross-sector approaches that tackle the root causes of inequality.

The Fair Education Alliance believes that we can only create an equitable system if we work together for the long-term. Our coalition of nearly 200 member organisations know that change will not come from any one actor progressing alone, but from collective action involving teachers, government, parents, charities, businesses, and young people.

Our members have developed a shared vision and are working together to create a fair, inclusive system which:

- **gives all young people a rounded education** so that they develop skills, are looked after emotionally and physically, and can achieve academically no matter their personal circumstances;
- **engages parents and communities** of all backgrounds so that education does not stop at the school gates;
- **supports, incentivises and rewards teachers and leaders** to enable all children to thrive, including by working in more disadvantaged areas; and
- **gives young people the knowledge, skills and awareness to succeed in life after school**, whether that be in further education, higher education or employment.

We must commit to making fundamental changes in the education system rather than incremental attempts to make an unfair system a little bit less unfair. Progress in closing the gap has been stalling over the last five years and it is now widening. It is important that we act on the data in front of us and significantly change the education system and in turn, make a fairer society.

Samantha Butters and Gina Cicerone, Co-CEOs, The Fair Education Alliance

Summary of findings

In this section we present our headline findings on educational attainment and inequalities in state schools in England from 2011 to 2019. More detail on our methodology is included in the Technical Appendix.

1. In 2019, average attainment at secondary school was slightly higher than in 2018, while it remained unchanged in the early years and primary school

To assess trends in overall attainment, we measure assessment scores at age 5, at the end of primary school and at the end of secondary school.

The early years

To measure educational progress in the early years, we use the total point score achieved by pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP), a teacher-led assessment at the end of Reception across a range of social, behavioural and cognitive developmental goals.

In 2019, the average EYFSP total point score was 34.6 (on a scale from 17 to 51). This has not changed since last year.

Primary school

For primary school level, we measure attainment using the average scaled score in reading and maths at key stage 2.

In 2019, the average scaled score was 103.2. This has not changed since last year.

Since the introduction of the scaled score key stage 2 tests in 2016, average attainment has improved by 1.9 scaled score points. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths has also increased from 57 per cent in 2016 to 68 per cent in 2019.¹

Secondary school

To assess overall attainment at secondary level we measure pupils' average GCSE grade across all GCSE subjects. We use the 9 to 1 grading system, which was introduced in 2017 for English and maths and in 2018 for many other subjects.²

In 2019, the average GCSE grade was 4.5. This represents a very slight increase of 0.7 per cent (or 0.03 of a grade) from the previous year.

2. The disadvantage gap has stopped closing over the last five years and there are several indications that it has begun to widen

We measure the disadvantage gap by comparing the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and their peers. We define a pupil as disadvantaged if they have been eligible for free school meals at any

¹ We do not use this 'threshold' measure as our headline measure because it may reflect strategic behaviour by schools to get pupils 'over the line' rather than substantive improvements in educational attainment.

² For GCSEs which had not converted to the new scale by 2018, we rescale the existing grades – our methodology is set out in more detail in the accompanying Technical Appendix to this summary.

point in the last six years, and non-disadvantaged if they have not, using the same definition as the Department for Education.³

Using data on pupils' exam results across all key stages, we order pupils by their exam results and assign them a rank. We calculate the average rank of the disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupil groups, and then subtract the latter from the former (this is the rank mean difference). Finally, we convert this into months of developmental progress, enabling us to reach a measure of how far behind poorer pupils are from their peers.

We cover the period from 2011 to 2019, with the exception of early years in which we omit results for 2011 and 2012 as they are based on the old EYFSP and therefore not comparable with later years.

As Figure 2.1 shows, the disadvantage gap has reduced at both primary and secondary level over this period as a whole, by 1.4 months (12.8 per cent) at primary and 1.6 months (8 per cent) at secondary.⁴ Our measure of early years attainment since 2013 suggests that very little progress has been made in closing the gap.

In last year's Annual Report, we identified an increase in the size of the gap in 2018 at secondary and a slight increase at early years, for the first time in the time series. We hypothesised that 2018 could prove to be a turning point at which progress in closing the gap is reversed and begins to unravel.

Figure 2.1: Trends in the size of the disadvantage gap (months) since 2011⁵

	Early years	Primary school	Secondary school	
	EYFSP total point score	KS2 scaled score in reading and maths	GCSE average grade	GCSE English and maths (average grade)
2011	-	10.6	20.4	19.7
2012	-	10.1	20.0	18.9
2013	4.7	10.0	19.6	18.6
2014	4.7	10.0	19.6	18.2
2015	4.6	9.7	19.4	18.1
2016	4.5	9.6	19.3	18.1
2017	4.5	9.5	18.4	17.9
2018	4.6	9.2	18.4	18.1
2019	4.6	9.3	18.4	18.1
2018-2019 change (%)	+0.1 (+1.4%)	+ 0.1 (+0.8%)	-0.0 (-0.2%)	+0.0 (+0.0%)
2011-2019 change (%)	n/a	-1.4 (-12.8%)	-2.0 (-9.8%)	-1.6 (-8.0%)

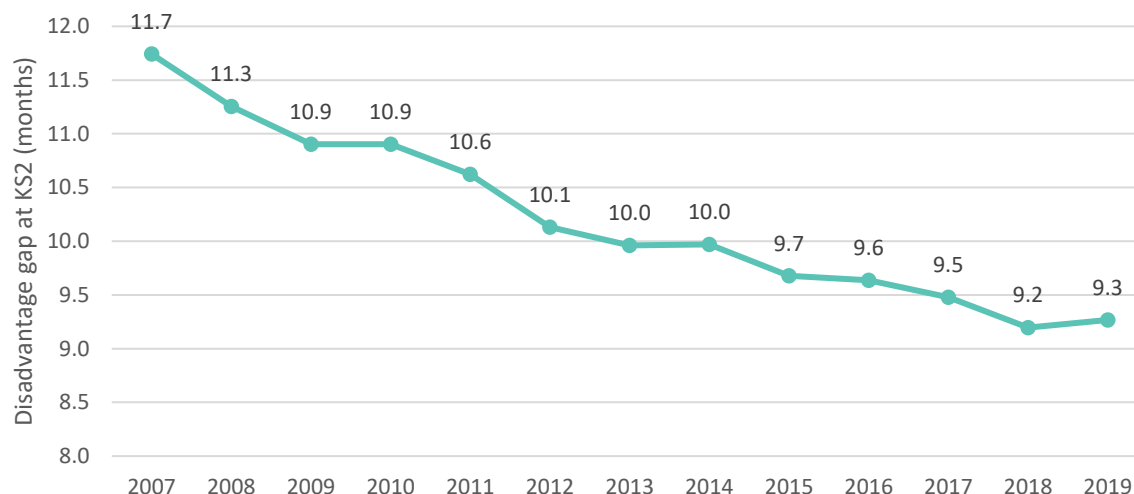
³ The DfE allocates the deprivation component of the pupil premium on this basis.

⁴ This is using our headline measure of key stage 4 attainment, the average grade in English and maths GCSEs, which unlike the average across all GCSEs is not influenced by changes in subject entry (e.g. due to the introduction of Progress 8 in 2016) that may bias the distribution of exam results over time, and are likely to account for the sharp reduction in the gap for all GCSEs in 2017.

⁵ Totals may not appear to sum from their constituent parts in tables due to rounding errors.

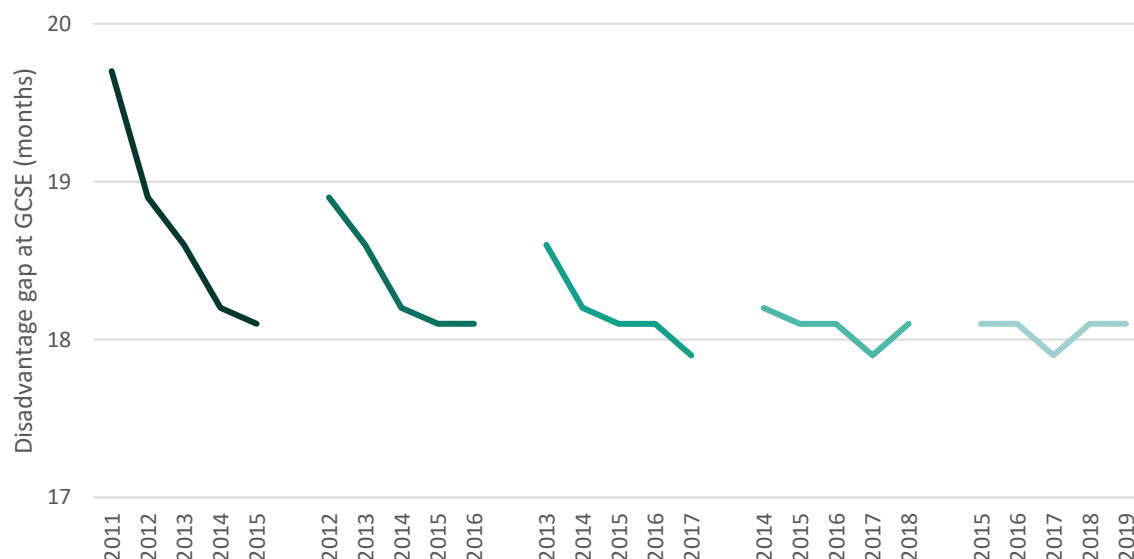
Our results from 2019 support this hypothesis (see Figure 2.1). At secondary and early years, the gap increased in 2018 and has since stabilised at these higher levels. In 2019 we also find that the gap has increased at primary level for the first time since at least 2007 (see Figure 2.2).⁶ This is a concerning indication that inequalities have stopped reducing and have started to widen.

Figure 2.2: Trends in the disadvantage gap in months at primary school



In last year's Annual Report, we modelled that if the trend over the last five years were to continue, it would take over 500 years for the disadvantage gap to be eliminated at secondary level in English and maths. This year the data suggests an even more extreme conclusion: the gap is not closing. Over the last five years, our headline measure of the gap at secondary level has not changed. If this were to continue, the gap would never close.

Figure 2.3: Five-year trends in the GCSE English and maths disadvantage gap



⁶ While we have a consistent time series going back to 2007 for primary level, we are not able to consistently measure the gap at secondary level prior to 2011.

Disadvantage gap by GCSE subject

This year we also provide a breakdown of the disadvantage gap by GCSE subject. As Figure 2.4 shows, the size of the disadvantage gap varies significantly by subject, ranging from 20.1 months in Music to -7.5 months in Biblical Hebrew.

However, there are also differences in the relative likelihood of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils taking certain subjects. Figure 2.4 therefore also shows the relative participation gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students alongside the disadvantage gap. This is the percentage point difference between the entry of non-disadvantaged and disadvantaged pupils within a given subject, divided by the percentage entry of non-disadvantaged pupils.

In most non-compulsory subjects, disadvantaged pupils are less likely to take the subject – this is most stark for Biblical Hebrew, Gujarati, Classical Greek, and Latin. However, in Art and Design, Combined Science, Portuguese, Urdu, Turkish, Bengali, Arabic and Persian, disadvantaged pupils are more likely to take the subject than non-disadvantaged pupils.

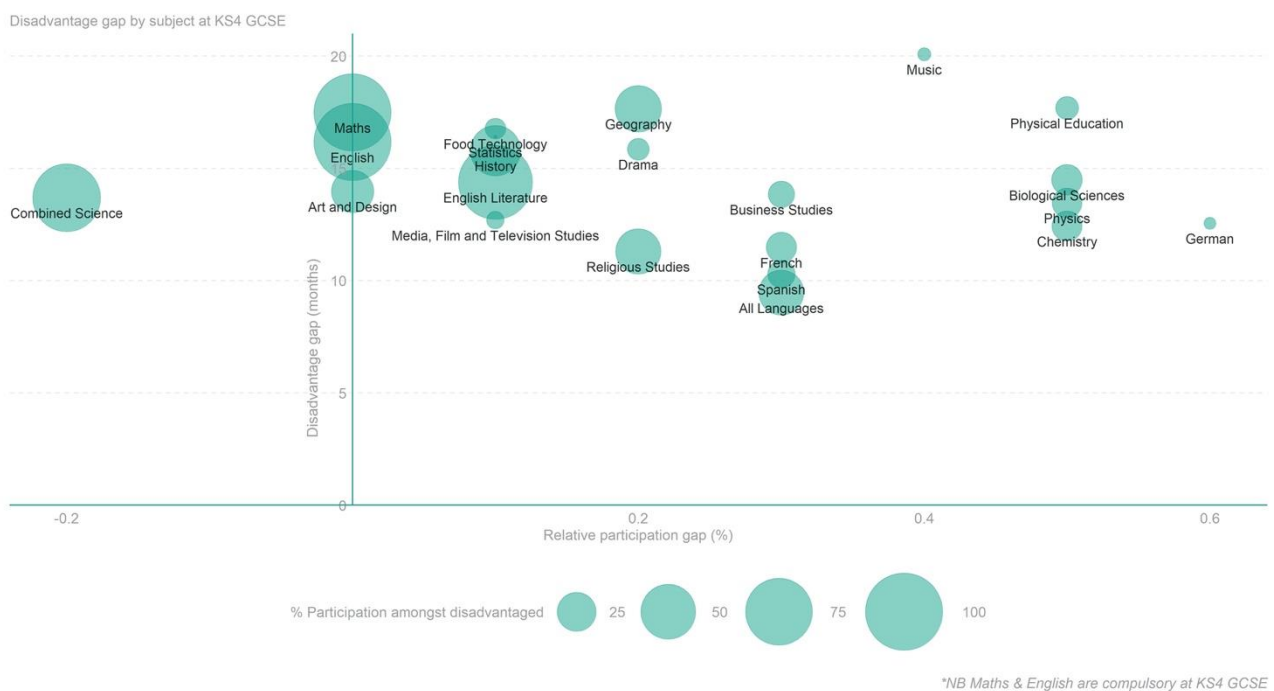
Figure 2.4: The disadvantage gap by subject at secondary school in 2019

	GCSE disadvantage gap (months)	Relative participation gap (%)	Total number of students
Music	20.1	38.3%	30,676
Physical Education	17.7	46.5%	81,583
Geography	17.7	21.6%	234,297
Maths	17.5	0.0%	541,140
Food Technology	16.8	6.8%	42,889
Statistics	16.4	12.3%	12,517
English	16.2	0.0%	541,140
Drama	15.9	15.8%	51,412
History	15.8	12.0%	251,187
Japanese	14.7	54.2%	352
Biological Sciences	14.5	49.6%	147,675
English Literature	14.4	5.3%	520,482
Latin	14.0	72.8%	3,595
Art and Design	14.0	-4.0%	155,923
Business Studies	13.8	28.5%	83,029
Combined Science	13.7	-15.1%	373,015
Physics	13.5	51.5%	145,830
Media, Film and Television Studies	12.7	9.0%	34,114
German	12.5	58.7%	38,951
Chemistry	12.4	51.4%	146,109
Chinese	11.6	31.4%	1,453
French	11.5	33.9%	115,847
Religious Studies	11.3	15.8%	210,034
Bengali	10.3	-204.5%	412
Spanish	10.3	30.5%	91,545
Polish	9.5	60.7%	3,018

Languages (all)	9.5	33.9%	252,802
Classical Greek	8.9	83.1%	114
Portuguese	8.4	-15.0%	2,159
Punjabi	7.7	16.2%	496
Modern Hebrew	7.0	66.2%	130
Urdu	6.4	-55.5%	2,553
Modern Greek	5.6	53.8%	205
Turkish	5.5	-133.5%	1,705
Italian	2.1	43.0%	3,258
Russian	0.1	51.6%	846
Gujarati	-1.1	84.1%	403
Arabic	-2.3	-228.1%	1,772
Persian	-4.8	-246.2%	359
Biblical Hebrew	-7.5	89.3%	235

Figure 2.5 charts the relationship between the disadvantage gap and relative participation gap. While no clear correlation emerges, there are some interesting patterns of note.

Figure 2.5: Disadvantage gap and relative participation gap by subject at secondary school in 2019⁷



The most inequalitarian subjects are Music and Physical Education, which have both high disadvantage gaps and high participation gaps. Disadvantaged pupils are 38 per cent less likely than non-disadvantaged pupils to take Music at GCSE and, when they do, they score the equivalent of 20 months behind their wealthier peers. This may be driven by parental investments in sport and music outside of school, such as private music and swimming lessons, that are less accessible for

⁷ Only subjects with a sample size greater than 5000 have been included in this figure. 'All languages' refers to the highest scoring language subject taken by pupils.

disadvantaged pupils. Disparities in schools' ability to provide equipment and facilities (such as playing fields and musical instruments) may also play a role.

The two effectively compulsory subjects at GCSE – English and maths – have relatively large disadvantage gaps compared to other subjects: 17.5 months in maths and 16.2 months in English.

Science subjects tend to have middling disadvantage gaps: 12.4 for Chemistry, 13.5 for Physics, 13.7 months for Combined Science and 14.5 for Biological Science. However, disadvantaged pupils are 15 per cent more likely to take Combined Science than their non-disadvantaged peers, and around 50 per cent less likely to take dual or triple sciences at GCSE. Given that dual/triple science subjects are taken by a relatively small proportion of the pupil population, it is perhaps surprising that their disadvantage gaps are not larger. However, this could be explained by selection of higher-attaining disadvantaged pupils into these subjects through 'ability' grouping at an early stage.

Language subjects tend to have smaller disadvantage gaps, though they are also taken by much smaller shares of the pupil population. In some language subjects – Gujarati, Arabic, Persian, and Biblical Hebrew – there is a negative disadvantage gap. This means that, on average, disadvantaged pupils do better than their non-disadvantaged peers in these community languages. This may be because disadvantaged pupils who take these subjects are bilingual or fluent in these languages and thereby score more highly than their peers despite being socio-economically disadvantaged.

Notably, in the humanities, Geography and Religious Studies have similar participation gaps, but Geography has a much larger disadvantage gap of 17.7 months compared to 11.3 months for Religious Studies. Meanwhile, History has a disadvantage gap of 15.3 months, and a relatively small participation gap of 12 per cent.

3. Since 2011, there has been less progress in closing the gap for persistently disadvantaged pupils. More recently, increases in persistent poverty among disadvantaged pupils have contributed to the halt in progress for the wider disadvantaged group

Using school census data, we are able to create a longitudinal picture of the length of time pupils are eligible for free school meals over the course of their school lives. This gives us an indication of the persistence of poverty and deprivation experienced by pupils. We define persistently disadvantaged pupils as those who are eligible for free school meals for 80 per cent or more of their school life.

Figure 3.1 shows that there has been barely any progress in closing the persistent disadvantage gap since 2011, particularly at secondary level. Over this period, the persistent disadvantage gap fell by just 0.4 months (3.4 per cent) at primary and 0.1 months (0.5 per cent) at secondary.

Figure 3.1: Trends in the size of the persistent disadvantage gap since 2011

	Primary school	Secondary school	
	KS2 scaled score in reading and maths	All GCSEs (average grade)	GCSE English and maths (average grade)
2011	12.5	23.5	22.8
2012	12.1	23.2	22.2
2013	12.1	23.4	22.4
2014	12.3	23.5	22.0
2015	12.2	23.7	22.6
2016	12.3	23.8	22.7
2017	12.3	23.0	22.8
2018	12.0	23.2	23.0
2019	12.1	22.9	22.7
2018-2019 change (%)	+ 0.1 (+1.0%)	- 0.2 (-1.1%)	- 0.3 (-1.2%)
2011-2019 change (%)	- 0.4 (-3.4%)	- 0.6 (-2.4%)	-0.1 (-0.5%)

Over the last three years, persistence of poverty has increased for disadvantaged pupils. As Figure 3.2 shows, from 2011 to 2015, disadvantaged pupils were disadvantaged for a decreasing proportion of their school lives each year, though the rate of change slowed over time. In 2016 it started increasing. Similarly, from 2011 to 2017 the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who were persistently disadvantaged decreased year on year, but in 2018 it started increasing for the first time in the time series.

Figure 3.2: Persistence of disadvantage among disadvantaged pupils at secondary school since 2011

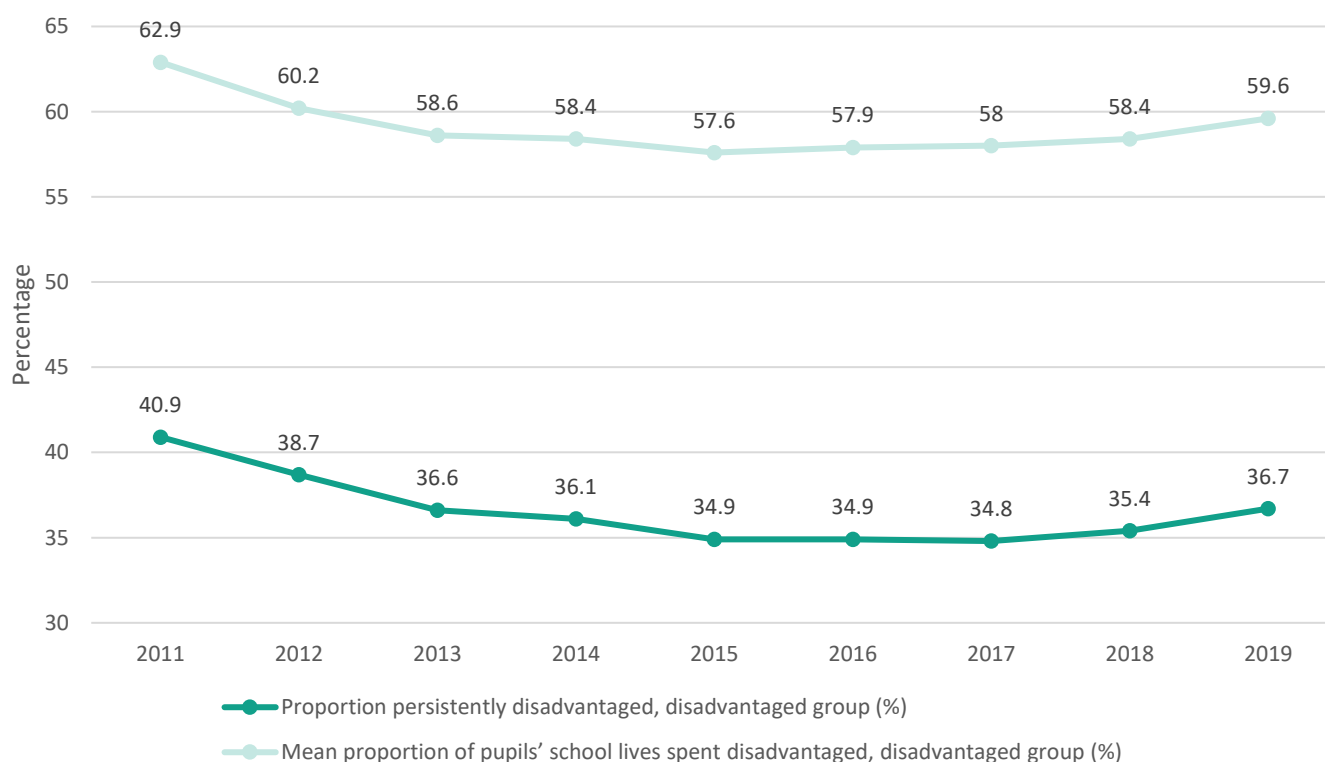


Figure 3.3 presents these changes in persistence of disadvantage in terms of yearly percentage change. It illustrates that these trends roughly align with the trend for the disadvantage gap: a slowing of progress before a widening of the gap in 2018.

Figure 3.3: Yearly percentage change in the persistence of disadvantage experienced by disadvantaged pupils, and the disadvantage gap at secondary school since 2011

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
% persistently disadvantaged	-5.5%	-5.4%	-1.4%	-3.1%	-0.0%	-0.2%	+1.6%	+3.7%
Mean proportion of pupils' school lives spent disadvantaged (%)	-4.3%	-2.6%	-0.4%	-1.4%	+0.5%	+0.1%	+0.8%	+1.9%
Disadvantage gap at secondary level (English and maths GCSE)	-3.9%	-1.9%	-2.0%	-0.3%	-0.2%	-0.8%	+1.0%	+0.0%

Given this, and pre-existing evidence that persistence of disadvantage is a key determinant of the disadvantage gap, for this year's Annual Report we decided to investigate the contribution that persistent disadvantage makes to the disadvantage gap.ⁱ

To do this at national level, we calculate disadvantage gaps at secondary school for five distinct pupil groups: those who are disadvantaged and eligible for FSM for:

- 0-19 per cent of their school life (low persistence)
- 20-39 per cent of their school life (low-medium persistence)
- 40-59 per cent of their school life (medium persistence)
- 60-79 per cent of their school life (medium-high persistence)
- 80-100 per cent of their school life of their school life (high persistence, i.e. persistently disadvantaged).⁸

All of these pupil groups experience disadvantage, having been eligible for free school meals at some point in the last six years. However, the lower persistence groups have experienced disadvantage more fleetingly than those in the higher persistence groups; they may be eligible for FSM for one or two years, but they are not claiming FSM for the majority of their school life.

Figure 3.4 shows the size of these persistence groups over time. In 2019, 37 per cent of disadvantaged pupils experienced high persistence; 16 per cent experienced medium-high persistence; 21 per cent experienced medium persistence; 16 per cent experienced low-medium persistence and 10 per cent experienced low persistence.

⁸ At national level, we look at trends for separate groups of persistence as this enables an examination of non-linear time trends. Like Gorard et al. (2019), we also employ a regression approach and calculate the 'adjusted' disadvantage gap by year and by region (see Section 7), controlling for average persistence of disadvantage within the disadvantaged group. See Technical Appendix for more information.

Since 2015, the high persistence group has grown by 5 per cent, while the low persistence group shrunk by 18 per cent. This reflects the rise in persistent poverty among disadvantaged pupils over the last few years, as evidenced previously in Figures 3.2 and 3.3.

Figure 3.4: Levels of persistent disadvantage among disadvantaged pupils at secondary school since 2011

	Low persistence	Low-medium persistence	Medium persistence	Medium-high persistence	High persistence
2011	8.0%	14.9%	18.3%	17.9%	40.9%
2012	10.7%	15.9%	17.7%	17.0%	38.7%
2013	11.5%	16.6%	18.9%	16.4%	36.6%
2014	11.5%	16.7%	19.0%	16.7%	36.1%
2015	12.1%	16.8%	19.4%	16.8%	34.9%
2016	11.6%	16.6%	19.6%	17.2%	34.9%
2017	11.3%	16.6%	20.0%	17.2%	34.8%
2018	10.8%	16.6%	20.4%	16.7%	35.4%
2019	9.9%	16.4%	20.8%	16.2%	36.7%
2011-2015 change	+4.2 pp (+52.5%)	+1.9 pp (+12.6%)	+1.1 pp (+6.0%)	-1.1 pp (-6.3%)	-6.0 pp (-14.7%)
2015-2019 change	-2.3 pp (-18.6%)	-0.3 pp (-2.0%)	+1.4 pp (+7.3%)	-0.6 pp (-3.7%)	+1.8 pp (+5.2%)

Figure 3.5 shows the disadvantage gap for each of these persistence groups. There is a clear relationship between the degree of persistence and the size of the gap: the more persistent the disadvantage, the larger the gap. At 23 months, the gap for the high persistence group (those who have been disadvantaged for 80 per cent or more of their school life) is **over twice the size of the gap** for the low persistence group (those who have been disadvantaged for less than 20 per cent).

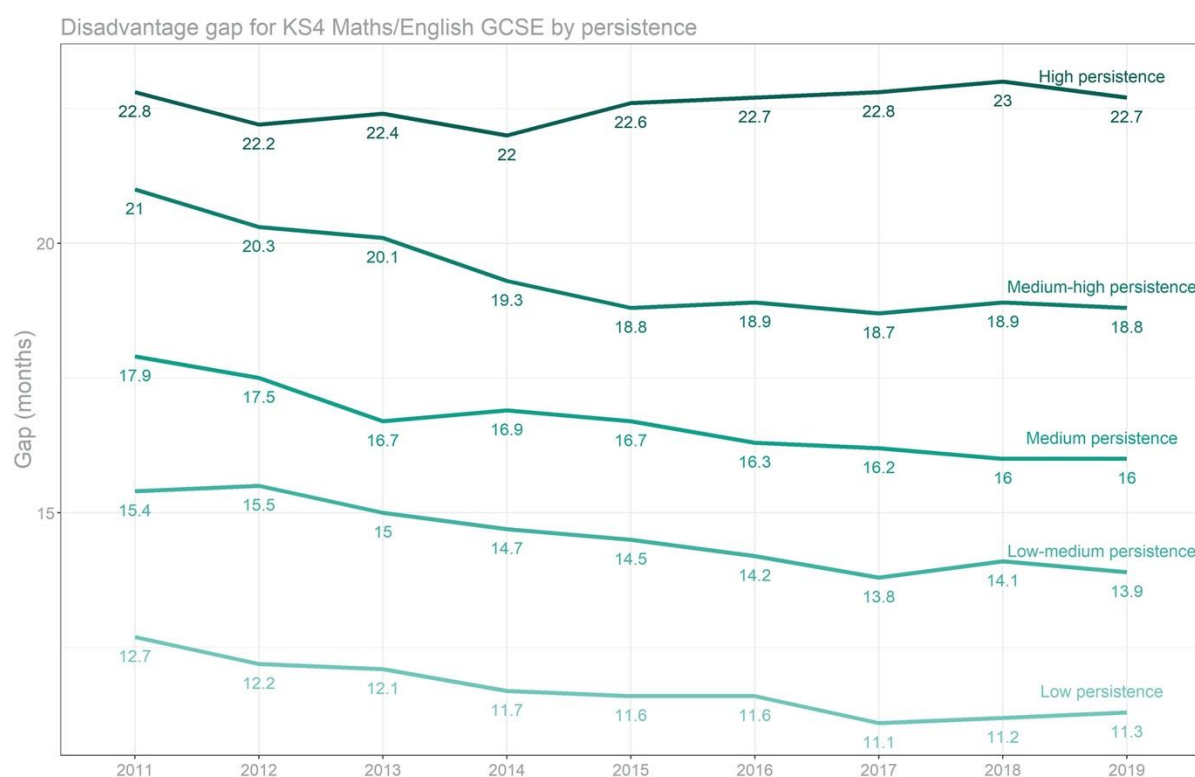
Figure 3.5: Disadvantage gap at secondary school by persistence of disadvantage since 2011 (GCSE English and maths)

	Low persistence	Low-medium persistence	Medium persistence	Medium-high persistence	High persistence
2011	12.7	15.4	17.9	21.0	22.8
2012	12.2	15.5	17.5	20.3	22.2
2013	12.1	15.0	16.7	20.1	22.4
2014	11.7	14.7	16.9	19.3	22.0
2015	11.6	14.5	16.7	18.8	22.6
2016	11.6	14.2	16.3	18.9	22.7
2017	11.1	13.8	16.2	18.7	22.8
2018	11.2	14.1	16.0	18.9	23.0
2019	11.3	13.9	16.0	18.8	22.7
2011-2019 change	-1.4 (-11.3%)	-1.4 (-9.4%)	-2.0 (-10.9%)	-2.2 (-10.3%)	-0.1 (-0.5%)

As Figure 3.6 illustrates graphically, there are also differences in terms of how much the gap has closed. While the low persistence group have seen a reduction in the gap of 1.4 months (11.3 per cent) since 2011, the high persistence group have seen a reduction of just 0.1 months (0.5 per cent):

since 2014, the gap for this persistently disadvantaged group has grown in every year except the last.

Figure 3.6: Disadvantage gap at secondary school by persistence of disadvantage since 2011 (GCSE English and maths)



The fact that the high persistence (persistently disadvantaged) group has occupied a growing share of the disadvantaged group since 2017 (see Figure 3.4) suggests that the slowing of progress in closing the gap is being driven in part by a compositional rise in persistent poverty among disadvantaged pupils.

However, in addition to the worsening of the gap for the most persistently disadvantaged since 2014, the gap also worsened since 2017 for three of the other five disadvantaged groups (including the least persistent two), so it is not just a compositional shift towards higher persistence or poorer outcomes for this group that explain the worsening trend in the gap. Factors affecting disadvantaged pupils as a whole – including the rise in poverty depth over the two decades and the squeeze on per pupil school funding and other public services since 2010 – are likely to have contributed.^{ii,iii}

4. The ethnicity gap for pupils from Black backgrounds and pupils arriving late in secondary school with English as an Additional Language (EAL) has widened significantly over the last decade

We now look at the gap by ethnic background, comparing the attainment of pupils from ethnic minorities with that of their white British peers.

There are notable variations in attainment by ethnic background. Pupils from Gypsy/Roma, Traveller of Irish Heritage, Black Caribbean, and White and Black Caribbean, Other Black Backgrounds, Pakistani, Any Other White Backgrounds, and Any Other Ethnic Backgrounds score lower on average

than their White British peers. **The gap is particularly large for Gypsy/Roma pupils, who are nearly three years behind by the end of secondary school, and Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils, who are two years behind.**

Meanwhile, there are other ethnic groups that do better on average than the White British ethnic group: in particular, **Chinese pupils are two years ahead and Indian pupils are 15 months ahead.** However, it should be noted that some of these ethnic groups represent very small proportions of the total pupil population and are therefore more skewed by individual outliers than larger ethnic groups. In 2019, Chinese pupils represented just 0.4 per cent of the GCSE cohort, while White British pupils represented 69 per cent.

Figure 4.1 shows that the ethnicity gap widens as children get older. It also shows a couple of cases in which the direction of the gap is reversed in the transition from primary to secondary school. For example, Bangladeshi students are 2.2 months behind White British pupils in the early years, but by the end of primary school they have made up that ground and are 2.6 months ahead on average (and then 5.1 months ahead at GCSE).

At primary and secondary level we also look at the attainment of pupils who are recent entrants to state schools in England and have English as an Additional Language (EAL) in the two years prior to being assessed.⁹ This is because research shows that the stage at which EAL pupils enter the English education system is key: the later they enter, the more disadvantaged they are, and this is related to their proficiency in the English language.^{iv,v} **At the end of primary school, late-arriving EAL pupils are 15.5 months behind native English speakers; at secondary, they are 20.7 months behind.**

⁹ We define late arriving EAL pupils as those who are recorded as having EAL, and who have entered the English state-school system in either Year 5 or Year 6 for key stage 2, or either Year 10 or Year 11 for key stage 4. The reference group against which these pupils are ranked is the group of pupils who are recorded with English as their first language in the current year, and who have never in the past been recorded as having EAL.

Figure 4.1: The size of the ethnicity gap (relative to white British children) at various ages in 2019

Ethnicity	Early years	Primary	Secondary (English and maths GCSE)
Late arriving EAL	n/a	15.5	20.7
Gypsy / Roma	8.1	19.2	34.0
Traveller of Irish Heritage	6.7	16.2	23.8
Black Caribbean	2.0	5.0	10.9
White and Black Caribbean	1.1	3.4	7.4
Any Other Black Background	2.3	2.8	6.9
Pakistani	2.9	1.2	1.4
Any Other White Background	2.2	0.2	1.4
Any Other Ethnic Group	3.1	0.9	0.2
Black - African	1.8	-0.4	0.1
White - British	0.0	0.0	0.0
White and Black African	0.5	-0.4	-0.3
Any Other Mixed Background	0.1	-1.9	-3.3
Bangladeshi	2.2	-2.6	-5.1
White - Irish	-1.2	-4.7	-8.4
White and Asian	-0.9	-4.8	-9.2
Any Other Asian Background	1.6	-4.5	-11.1
Indian	-0.6	-7.4	-14.2
Chinese	-1.0	-11.8	-23.9

Figure 4.2 shows how the secondary ethnicity gap has changed over the last decade. The most striking changes have been a **widening of the gap by three months (77 per cent) for pupils from Any Other Black Background, by 4.4 months (68 per cent) for Black Caribbean pupils, and by 2.1 months (11 per cent) for late arriving EAL pupils**. Meanwhile, pupils from Bangladeshi and Any Other Asian Backgrounds, who on average score higher at GCSE than White British pupils, have pulled away by four months (an increase of fourfold and 78 per cent respectively).

Figure 4.2: Trends in the size of the secondary ethnicity gap (relative to white British children) at English and maths GCSE since 2011

Ethnicity	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Late arriving EAL	18.6	18.8	20.0	20.3	19.8	18.7	18.6	19.3	20.7
Gypsy / Roma	34.8	35.3	34.2	36.1	36.5	36.2	35.5	34.8	34.0
Traveller of Irish Heritage	30.6	30.7	29.9	30.6	29.7	28.5	27.8	29.0	23.8
Black Caribbean	6.5	6.6	6.4	6.2	7.3	8.4	8.7	10.4	10.9
White and Black Caribbean	6.1	5.5	4.7	5.1	5.2	5.8	7.2	7.0	7.4
Any Other Black Background	3.9	6.5	4.9	5.6	6.9	6.3	6.8	6.6	6.9
Information Not Yet Obtained	3.5	2.4	1.3	4.9	5.0	2.9	3.4	5.2	5.3
Pakistani	3.6	2.7	3.3	3.6	3.2	3.7	2.5	2.0	1.4
Any Other White Background	1.5	2.4	2.0	1.6	2.1	2.0	1.2	1.2	1.4
Any Other Ethnic Group	1.0	0.1	-0.6	-0.7	-1.1	0.3	0.3	0.7	0.2
Black - African	-0.1	0.2	-0.3	0.0	0.6	0.4	-0.2	-0.3	0.1
White - British	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
White and Black African	-0.5	-1.5	-2.1	-1.1	-1.7	0.0	-0.5	0.7	-0.3
Refused	-1.1	-2.7	-2.3	-3.1	-3.1	-0.9	-1.6	0.2	-0.6
Any Other Mixed Background	-4.1	-3.4	-4.1	-4.1	-3.7	-3.0	-3.3	-3.3	-3.3
Bangladeshi	-0.9	-1.8	-2.1	-2.8	-4.1	-2.8	-4.7	-4.0	-5.1
White - Irish	-7.9	-7.3	-7.7	-8.5	-7.7	-8.3	-8.7	-8.7	-8.4
White and Asian	-9.2	-8.0	-8.3	-8.6	-8.5	-8.1	-8.2	-8.2	-9.2
Any Other Asian Background	-6.2	-6.0	-6.3	-6.4	-7.8	-8.8	-9.3	-9.8	-11.1
Indian	-13.0	-12.7	-12.7	-12.7	-11.9	-11.5	-12.8	-12.8	-14.2
Chinese	-21.3	-21.6	-21.3	-20.9	-21.0	-21.3	-22.2	-23.3	-23.9

5. Progress in reducing gaps for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) pupils has been slow, particularly for pupils with greater needs, and particularly since the SEND reforms in 2014

There are two main categories of SEND pupils – those with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) (or, prior to 2014, a statement of SEND support) and those without. SEND pupils without an EHCP normally receive school support through regular school notional special needs budgets. SEND pupils with an EHCP are assessed to have more substantial needs; in this case, SEND support is mandated by, and in many cases partially funded by, the local authority.

As with other disadvantage gaps, the size of the SEND gap increases as children get older (see Figure 5.1). At the age of five, SEND pupils with a statement or EHCP are already 15 months behind their peers, on average. Those differences compound over time, meaning that **by the end of secondary school, SEND pupils with a statement or EHCP are over three years behind their peers, on average.** SEND pupils without a statement or EHCP are two years behind.

Figure 5.1: The gap in months between pupils with SEND and their peers in 2019

	Early years	Primary school	Secondary school (English and maths GCSE)
SEND no statement / EHCP	9.8	18.4	24.4
SEND statement / EHCP	15.3	28.1	41.1

Figure 5.2 shows how SEND gaps at secondary school have changed since 2011. Since 2015, progress in closing the gap for the non-EHCP SEND group has slowed, and it has stalled altogether for those with an EHCP.

While the gap for pupils receiving SEND support without a statement or EHCP reduced by three months (9.6 per cent) in the four-year period from 2011 to 2015, in the four-year period from 2015 to 2019 it closed by just 1.5 months (5.9 per cent).

This slowing of progress has been more pronounced for pupils with greater needs. **The gap for pupils with a statement or EHCP narrowed by three months (7.5 per cent) from 2011 to 2015, but has since stagnated and even increased slightly, by 0.1 per cent.**

Figure 5.2: Trends in the size of the secondary SEND gap in English and Maths GCSE since 2011

	SEND no statement / EHCP	SEND with statement / EHCP
2011	28.6	44.3
2012	28.2	44.0
2013	27.8	43.3
2014	26.7	42.6
2015	25.9	41.0
2016	25.5	41.1
2017	25.5	41.3
2018	25.0	41.5
2019	24.4	41.1
2015-2019 change	-1.5 (-5.9%)	+0.0 (+0.1%)
2011-2015 change	-2.7 (-9.6%)	-3.3 (-7.5%)

These trends should be interpreted within the context of changes in the prevalence of these SEND groups (see Figure 5.3). The group receiving SEND support without a statement or EHCP reduced as a proportion of the pupil cohort by 39 per cent from 2011 to 2015, as thresholds for identification of this group rose in response to the incoming reforms of 2014. This makes the reduction in the gap for the non-EHCP SEND group from 2011 to 2015 surprising, given the policy context and the fact that any reduction in the size of the group due to threshold changes would – if anything – drive an increase in the average severity of the group and thereby the size of the gap. One explanation could be that the pupils who were removed from the school action group were not actually receiving structured additional school support; they were merely recorded on the SEND register to flag that they were facing challenges with their learning. The exit of these pupils from the group would mean that the remaining pupils were those receiving comparatively more support, thus potentially explaining some of the improvement in the gap from 2011 to 2015.

It is not possible to determine what drove the trends with any certainty but it is clear that the current non-EHCP group is making worse progress than the previous non-EHCP group did. Since 2015-16, the size of the non-EHCP group has been relatively stable (see Figure 5.3), while progress in closing the gap slowed (see Figure 5.2).

By contrast, the size of the EHCP group among GCSE pupils has been relatively stable since 2011 (see Figure 5.3).¹⁰ The slight widening of the gap for this group is therefore unlikely to be explained by compositional changes. The turning point around 2015 roughly coincides with the gradual implementation of the 2014 SEND reforms. While it is not possible from this research to conclude whether these changes are causally attributable to these reforms, we can conclude at best that they have not yet been effective in improving outcomes for SEND pupils, and at worst that their implementation may have been detrimental.

Figure 5.3: Proportion of secondary school pupils identified with SEND by type since 2011

	% SEND no statement / EHCP	% SEND with statement / EHCP
2011	20.2	3.7
2012	18.6	3.7
2013	17.0	3.8
2014	15.8	3.8
2015	12.4	3.8
2016	10.8	3.8
2017	10.3	3.7
2018	10.3	3.7
2019	10.4	3.8
2015-2019 change	-2.0 (-15.8%)	-0.0 (-0.7%)
2011-2015 change	-7.8 (-38.7%)	+0.0 (+1.2%)

6. Pupils who are in the care system, have a social worker, or are on a child protection plan are significantly behind their peers by end of secondary school

For the first time this year, we measure the size of the disadvantage gap for children in the care system (known as looked after children) and children who are receiving support from children's services (known as children in need).

Looked after children are cared for by their local authority for a period of more than 24 hours, for example in a children's residential home or a foster home. Meanwhile, children in need receive support from a social worker for a variety of reasons including abuse or neglect, disability, family dysfunction or socially unacceptable behaviour. Of those children who are in need, those who have

¹⁰ Note that our estimates for the share of pupils who are identified with SEND with a statement/EHCP differ from published DfE statistics (DfE, 'Special Educational Needs in England', July 2020, <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england>) because the latter covers all school-age children, whereas our estimates specifically cover to the pupil population in Year 11. DfE's statistics suggest that the share of pupils with an EHCP in schools has increased since 2017; our estimates here suggest that for pupils at the end of secondary school specifically, it has been relatively stable.

experienced neglect, or physical, sexual or emotional abuse will usually have a child protection plan (CPP) drawn up by the local authority to ensure that their needs are safeguarded and protected.

We find that all three of these groups are significantly behind their peers in terms of their educational attainment at secondary school, more so than the disadvantaged group to which we refer in our main analysis.¹¹ **By the time they sit their GCSEs, looked after children are 29 months behind their peers. Meanwhile, children in need with a child protection plan are 26 months behind, and children in need without a child protection plan are 20 months behind.**

Figure 6.1: The gap in months at secondary school (English and maths GCSE) between children looked after (LAC); children in need with a Child Protection Plan (CPP); and children in need without a CPP (CIN).

	Looked after children (LAC)	Child protection plan (CPP)	In need (CIN)
2014	30.0	28.4	21.3
2015	29.4	27.8	20.6
2016	29.3	26.4	20.4
2017	29.4	26.2	20.2
2018	29.3	25.9	20.2
2019	29.0	25.7	19.6
2018-2019 change (%)	- 0.3 (-1.1%)	- 0.2 (-0.9%)	- 0.6 (-3.1%)
2014-2019 change (%)	- 1.0 (-3.3%)	- 2.8 (-9.7%)	- 1.7 (-8.2%)

Since 2014, the size of the gap has decreased for all three of these groups, though to differing extents. The gap reduced by 2.8 months (10 per cent) for children on a child protection plan, and by 1.7 months (8 per cent) for children in need. However, looked after children have seen less progress, with the gap reducing by just 1 month (3 per cent).

The progress demonstrated by children in need and children with a child protection plan may be in part a reflection of reduced referral thresholds and the consequent ‘growth’ of these groups as a proportion of the student population: as the bar for referring children to social services or placing them on a protection plan has lowered, the overall profile of these groups may have become less severely vulnerable, which may have reduced the size of the gap.^{vi} As Figure 6.2 shows, **the number of children on a child protection plan has doubled in relative terms since 2014, and the children in need and looked after children groups have also expanded slightly.**

It is notable, however, that like SEND pupils with a statement or EHCP, the looked after group has seen little progress in closing the gap despite its expansion as a proportion of the pupil population.

¹¹ We compare the attainment of these three groups with that of children who have been neither in need, looked after, or on a child protection plan at any point over the last six years.

Figure 6.2: Proportion of pupils who are looked after, have a child protection plan, or are in need at the end of secondary school, 2014-2019

	% looked after	% child protection plan	% in need
2014	1.4	0.6	10.7
2015	1.4	0.9	11.7
2016	1.5	1.2	11.8
2017	1.5	1.5	11.7
2018	1.5	1.8	11.8
2019	1.5	1.9	12.0
2018-2019 change (%)	+ 0.0 pp (+ 1.7%)	+ 0.2 pp (+8.6%)	+ 0.2 pp (+1.8%)
2014-2019 change (%)	+ 0.1 pp (+7.4%)	+ 1.3 pp (+213.9%)	+ 1.3 pp (+11.9%)

All three of these vulnerable pupil groups have high levels of socio-economic disadvantage, as measured by eligibility for free school meals. **In 2019, 77 per cent of children on a child protection plan, 59 per cent of looked after children, and 54 per cent of children in need had been eligible for free school meals over the last six years.** This compares with just 19 per cent of their peers.

While children in need and children on a child protection plan have on average become less likely to be eligible for free school meals over time, looked after children have seen no change (see Figure 6.3).

This suggests that the **improvements in the gap for children in need and children on a child protection plan are likely to be driven by the compositional effect of decreased disadvantage and/or lower risk thresholds; meanwhile, looked after children have seen steady disadvantage and a steadier gap size.**

Figure 6.3: Proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals over the last six years for looked after children, children on a child protection plan, and children in need at the end of secondary school, 2014-2019

	Looked after	Child protection plan	In need
2014	59.3	81.6	59.5
2015	60.5	80.7	58.9
2016	60.6	80.4	58.5
2017	60.5	80.1	56.6
2018	58.7	79.4	55.4
2019	59.2	77.1	54.1
2014-2019 change (%)	- 0.1 pp (-0.2%)	- 4.5 pp (-5.6%)	- 5.5 pp (-9.2%)

In sum, **the group that has seen the most policy intervention and the least compositional change – looked after children – has experienced little progress.** Meanwhile, children on child protection plans and children in need have seen better progress, but this could well be a reflection of compositional change, especially in the case of child protection plan pupils who have expanded as a group significantly.

The gaps for looked after children and children on a child protection plan are even larger than the gap for persistently disadvantaged children. Yet while looked after children have some targeted interventions through the Pupil Premium Plus, Virtual School Heads and Personal Education Plans,

children on a child protection plan receive no specific school support funding in spite of experiencing trauma and being, on average, over two years behind their peers by age 16. Twenty-three per cent of children on a child protection plan are not eligible for free school meals and thereby for Pupil Premium funding. Research also shows that children on a CPP are disproportionately likely to be excluded or to experience an unexplained exit from school.^{vii,viii}

7. Regional variation in the disadvantage gap is partly explained by different levels of persistent poverty between regions

As shown in Annex A, there is regional variation in the size of the disadvantage gap at local authority level in the early years, primary school and secondary school. Further regional breakdowns, including by parliamentary constituency, Opportunity Area and Regional School Commissioner, can be found in the Geographical Analysis Pack.

There is evidence that the size of the disadvantage gap by region is strongly influenced by the persistence of disadvantage and the ethnic composition of regions, however.^{ix} Given our findings about the importance of the persistence of disadvantage in determining the size of the gap, this year we include estimates of both a 'raw' (uncontrolled) and 'adjusted' (controlled) disadvantage gap. The adjusted gap is what the gap would be if each local authority had the same level of persistence of disadvantage (i.e. the national level). Further information about how we calculate these gaps is available in the Technical Appendix.

Figure 7.1 shows the size and rank of the disadvantage gap by local authority, both with and without adjustment for the persistence of disadvantage. Local authorities are ranked in descending order of their disadvantage gaps, with 1 being the local authority with the largest gap, and 152 the lowest.

We find that adjusting for the persistence of disadvantage in a region has a significant impact on the disadvantage gap, and on the relative ranking of local authorities. The gap worsens for half of local authorities and improves for the other half. As Figure 7.2 shows, it tends to improve the gap for areas with relatively high levels of persistent poverty, and it worsens the gap for areas with relatively low levels of persistent poverty.

For areas with high levels of persistent poverty such as Walsall, Knowsley, Newcastle upon Tyne and Portsmouth, adjusting for persistence reduces their disadvantage gap. This means they might not be doing as badly as the raw ranking suggests, given the profile of disadvantage they are dealing with. These local authorities tend to be clustered in London, the North East, North West and West Midlands, and Yorkshire and the Humber.

Meanwhile, for local authorities with relatively low levels of persistent poverty such as Barnet, Wokingham, Newham, and Oxfordshire, the adjusted disadvantage gap is larger than the raw gap. This means that, conditional on the profile of students they cater for, these areas are not doing as well as their raw gaps suggest. These local authorities tend to be clustered in the South East, South West, East of England, and East Midlands.

These findings suggest that caution should be used when interpreting how well local authorities or schools are doing in terms of their disadvantage gaps, as the gap can be a complex reflection of socio-economic characteristics of the pupil cohort which are, to a certain extent, beyond the control of local authorities, multi-academy trusts and individual schools.

Figure 7.1: The size of the raw and adjusted disadvantage gap at secondary level (English and maths GCSE) by local authority in 2019¹²

Local authority	Mean % of pupils' school lives for which they are disadvantaged	% persistently disadvantaged	Raw gap	Adjusted gap	Difference	Raw rank	Adjusted rank
Blackpool	24.7%	15.9%	26.3	24.5	-1.8	1	3
Knowsley	29.3%	20.1%	24.7	22.0	-2.7	2	30
Plymouth	18.4%	11.2%	24.5	23.9	-0.5	3	5
Derby	18.6%	10.9%	23.9	23.4	-0.6	4	8
Reading	15.9%	8.4%	23.9	23.8	0.0	5	6
South Gloucestershire	8.6%	4.5%	23.6	25.0	1.4	6	1
Portsmouth	20.6%	12.2%	23.6	22.6	-1.0	7	20
Peterborough	15.6%	8.1%	23.1	23.1	0.0	8	10
Sheffield	20.7%	13.3%	23.1	22.1	-1.0	9	27
Torbay	16.9%	9.6%	23.0	22.8	-0.2	10	18
Isle of Wight	14.8%	8.0%	22.9	23.1	0.2	11	11
Salford	24.4%	15.6%	22.9	21.2	-1.7	12	45
Rotherham	17.5%	10.5%	22.8	22.5	-0.4	13	21
Bracknell Forest	9.1%	4.6%	22.7	24.0	1.3	14	4
West Berkshire	6.3%	2.9%	22.7	24.5	1.9	15	2
Sunderland	24.2%	17.3%	22.5	20.8	-1.7	16	55
Kent	12.6%	7.2%	22.4	23.1	0.6	17	13
Cheshire West and Chester	13.0%	7.5%	22.3	22.9	0.5	18	16
Herefordshire	10.1%	4.9%	22.3	23.4	1.1	19	7
Telford and Wrekin	17.3%	9.6%	22.2	21.9	-0.3	20	34
Staffordshire	11.2%	5.9%	22.2	23.1	0.9	21	12
Newcastle upon Tyne	26.5%	17.2%	22.0	19.9	-2.2	22	66
Liverpool	30.4%	21.4%	22.0	19.1	-3.0	23	83
Cumbria	10.9%	5.9%	22.0	23.0	1.0	24	15
Hartlepool	26.3%	17.8%	22.0	19.9	-2.1	25	65
North Tyneside	16.1%	9.6%	22.0	21.9	-0.1	26	33
Somerset	10.6%	5.1%	22.0	23.0	1.0	27	14
Northumberland	13.3%	7.4%	22.0	22.4	0.5	28	22
Central Bedfordshire	9.1%	4.6%	21.8	23.2	1.3	29	9
Wigan	14.9%	8.4%	21.7	21.9	0.2	30	35
Gloucestershire	10.1%	5.5%	21.6	22.7	1.1	31	19
Bradford	20.2%	12.3%	21.5	20.6	-0.9	32	58

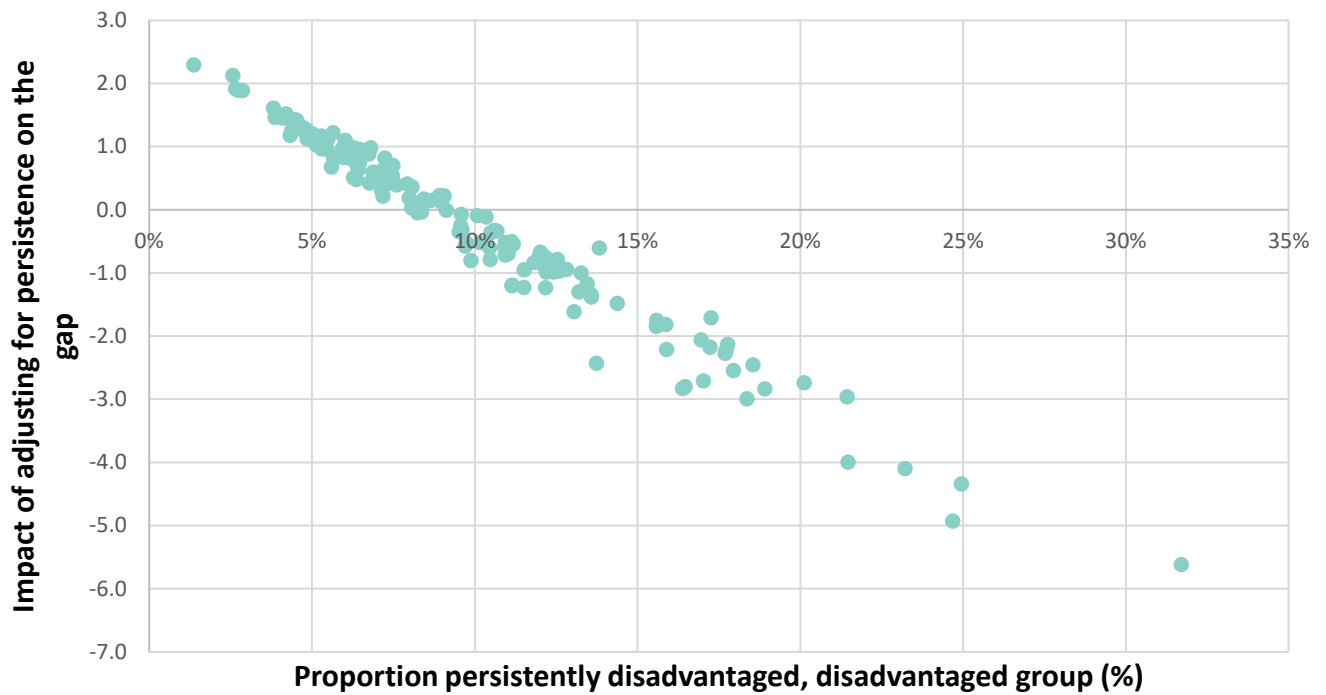
¹² Isles of Scilly and City of London are omitted due to low cell counts.

Hampshire	9.4%	4.8%	21.5	22.8	1.3	33	17
Bristol	20.5%	12.6%	21.4	20.5	-1.0	34	59
Worcestershire	11.2%	6.1%	21.4	22.3	0.9	35	24
Dudley	17.4%	10.7%	21.2	20.9	-0.3	36	53
Sefton	16.2%	10.1%	21.2	21.1	-0.1	37	48
Wirral	20.4%	12.8%	21.2	20.2	-0.9	38	63
Poole	9.4%	4.4%	21.0	22.3	1.3	39	25
Bedford	13.6%	7.3%	21.0	21.4	0.4	40	39
Middlesbrough	27.9%	18.5%	21.0	18.5	-2.5	41	91
West Sussex	8.4%	3.9%	20.9	22.4	1.5	42	23
Stockport	14.6%	9.1%	20.9	21.1	0.2	43	47
Southampton	20.1%	12.1%	20.9	20.0	-0.9	44	64
Shropshire	9.9%	5.0%	20.9	22.0	1.2	45	29
Warwickshire	9.7%	5.0%	20.9	22.1	1.2	46	28
East Sussex	13.0%	7.2%	20.9	21.4	0.5	47	40
St. Helens	18.2%	11.1%	20.8	20.3	-0.5	48	61
Bath and North East Somerset	10.0%	5.2%	20.8	21.9	1.2	49	32
Cambridgeshire	9.9%	5.3%	20.8	21.9	1.2	50	31
Stoke-on-Trent	20.6%	12.4%	20.8	19.8	-1.0	51	68
Devon	11.3%	6.8%	20.8	21.7	0.9	52	37
Wiltshire	8.6%	4.5%	20.7	22.2	1.4	53	26
Cornwall	12.0%	6.5%	20.7	21.5	0.8	54	38
Suffolk	12.1%	6.4%	20.7	21.4	0.7	55	41
Walsall	23.1%	14.4%	20.7	19.2	-1.5	56	80
Nottingham	26.8%	17.7%	20.6	18.4	-2.2	57	92
Lincolnshire	11.7%	6.2%	20.6	21.4	0.8	58	42
Redcar and Cleveland	19.5%	12.0%	20.6	19.8	-0.8	59	67
Oxfordshire	9.3%	4.8%	20.4	21.7	1.3	60	36
Norfolk	12.7%	6.9%	20.4	21.0	0.6	61	51
Northamptonshire	11.5%	5.7%	20.4	21.2	0.8	62	44
Brighton and Hove	15.1%	9.0%	20.3	20.5	0.1	63	60
Durham	19.4%	12.2%	20.3	19.5	-0.7	64	76
Southend-on-Sea	13.3%	6.4%	20.2	20.7	0.5	65	57
Dorset	10.8%	6.3%	20.2	21.1	1.0	66	46
Leeds	18.3%	10.9%	20.1	19.6	-0.5	67	73
Kirklees	18.7%	13.8%	20.1	19.5	-0.6	68	77
Darlington	18.7%	10.5%	20.0	19.4	-0.6	69	79
North Somerset	10.9%	5.3%	20.0	21.0	1.0	70	52
Leicestershire	8.5%	4.1%	19.9	21.4	1.5	71	43
Lancashire	13.9%	8.1%	19.9	20.3	0.4	72	62
Cheshire East	9.6%	5.7%	19.9	21.1	1.2	73	49
Essex	10.9%	5.5%	19.8	20.8	1.0	74	56
South Tyneside	24.9%	15.6%	19.8	18.0	-1.8	75	97

North Yorkshire	8.7%	4.5%	19.7	21.1	1.4	76	50
Halton	27.0%	17.7%	19.5	17.3	-2.3	77	106
Kingston upon Hull	26.0%	17.0%	19.5	17.5	-2.1	78	101
North East Lincolnshire	15.2%	8.4%	19.5	19.6	0.1	79	72
Coventry	19.7%	12.3%	19.5	18.6	-0.8	80	88
Oldham	22.6%	13.6%	19.4	18.1	-1.4	81	96
Bury	14.6%	8.9%	19.3	19.6	0.2	82	75
Tameside	19.3%	10.9%	19.2	18.5	-0.7	83	90
Surrey	7.7%	3.8%	19.2	20.8	1.6	84	54
Derbyshire	13.7%	7.9%	19.2	19.6	0.4	85	74
Rochdale	22.2%	13.2%	19.1	17.8	-1.3	86	98
North Lincolnshire	15.4%	8.3%	19.1	19.1	0.1	87	81
Gateshead	19.6%	12.5%	19.1	18.3	-0.8	88	95
Milton Keynes	12.3%	5.6%	19.0	19.7	0.7	89	70
Leicester	19.2%	11.0%	19.0	18.3	-0.7	90	94
Sandwell	21.5%	13.5%	18.9	17.7	-1.2	91	100
Wolverhampton	22.4%	13.6%	18.8	17.4	-1.3	92	102
Warrington	11.0%	6.5%	18.7	19.6	1.0	93	71
East Riding of Yorkshire	10.2%	5.5%	18.7	19.8	1.1	94	69
Wakefield	15.7%	9.1%	18.6	18.6	0.0	95	89
Bournemouth	13.2%	7.1%	18.6	19.1	0.5	96	82
Bolton	19.5%	12.1%	18.6	17.8	-0.8	97	99
Medway	13.6%	6.8%	18.6	19.0	0.4	98	84
Manchester	29.8%	18.9%	18.2	15.4	-2.8	99	119
Barnsley	19.9%	11.8%	18.1	17.3	-0.8	100	105
Nottinghamshire	13.0%	7.5%	18.1	18.6	0.5	101	87
Thurrock	13.7%	7.6%	18.0	18.3	0.4	102	93
Hertfordshire	9.3%	4.6%	17.7	19.0	1.3	103	85
Buckinghamshire	6.3%	2.7%	17.5	19.4	1.9	104	78
Doncaster	18.3%	10.2%	17.3	16.8	-0.5	105	108
Calderdale	15.0%	8.4%	17.2	17.3	0.1	106	104
Lewisham	23.7%	13.1%	17.0	15.4	-1.6	107	118
Swindon	12.2%	7.5%	16.7	17.4	0.7	108	103
Luton	18.3%	9.7%	16.6	16.1	-0.5	109	110
Croydon	19.6%	10.5%	16.5	15.8	-0.8	110	113
Wokingham	5.1%	2.6%	16.5	18.7	2.1	111	86
Stockton-on-Tees	19.0%	12.0%	16.5	15.8	-0.7	112	112
Solihull	11.6%	7.2%	16.1	16.9	0.8	113	107
Blackburn with Darwen	17.3%	10.6%	15.9	15.5	-0.3	114	116
Enfield	21.6%	11.2%	15.7	14.5	-1.2	115	120
Bromley	10.6%	5.3%	15.5	16.5	1.0	116	109

Bexley	11.7%	5.7%	15.2	16.0	0.8	117	111
Birmingham	28.4%	17.9%	15.1	12.5	-2.5	118	127
Greenwich	21.8%	11.5%	15.0	13.8	-1.2	119	122
Havering	12.5%	6.4%	15.0	15.6	0.6	120	115
York	8.2%	4.2%	14.2	15.7	1.5	121	114
Lambeth	29.6%	16.5%	13.8	11.0	-2.8	122	134
Merton	14.9%	8.7%	13.6	13.7	0.2	123	124
Haringey	26.7%	15.9%	13.6	11.4	-2.2	124	132
Windsor and Maidenhead	6.2%	2.7%	13.5	15.4	1.9	125	117
Barking and Dagenham	21.8%	12.2%	13.3	12.1	-1.2	126	129
Trafford	10.8%	6.8%	13.0	14.0	1.0	127	121
Hillingdon	15.9%	8.2%	12.9	12.9	0.0	128	125
Kingston upon Thames	9.8%	4.3%	12.6	13.7	1.2	129	123
Sutton	11.6%	6.0%	12.0	12.8	0.8	130	126
Slough	13.2%	6.3%	11.3	11.8	0.5	131	131
Richmond upon Thames	10.2%	6.0%	11.2	12.3	1.1	132	128
Harrow	14.2%	7.1%	10.9	11.2	0.3	133	133
Wandsworth	21.7%	11.1%	10.5	9.3	-1.2	134	135
Islington	40.2%	24.7%	10.2	5.2	-4.9	135	143
Waltham Forest	20.4%	11.5%	10.1	9.2	-0.9	136	136
Camden	35.6%	21.5%	9.9	5.9	-4.0	137	141
Rutland	4.3%	1.4%	9.6	11.9	2.3	138	130
Southwark	30.6%	18.4%	9.5	6.5	-3.0	139	138
Hackney	36.1%	23.2%	8.9	4.8	-4.1	140	144
Hammersmith and Fulham	29.2%	17.0%	8.8	6.1	-2.7	141	140
Hounslow	18.6%	9.7%	8.7	8.1	-0.6	142	137
Kensington and Chelsea	29.8%	16.4%	7.5	4.6	-2.8	143	145
Brent	19.7%	9.9%	6.9	6.1	-0.8	144	139
Tower Hamlets	43.7%	31.7%	5.9	0.3	-5.6	145	149
Newham	27.8%	13.7%	5.9	3.5	-2.4	146	147
Barnet	14.6%	7.2%	5.6	5.8	0.2	147	142
Ealing	17.4%	9.5%	4.6	4.3	-0.3	148	146
Redbridge	16.3%	10.4%	2.7	2.5	-0.1	149	148
Westminster	37.3%	25.0%	0.5	-3.9	-4.3	150	150

Figure 7.2: Relationship between persistent disadvantage of disadvantaged pupils and the impact of adjusting for persistent disadvantage on the gap at local authority level



Conclusion

This year's Annual Report provides concerning evidence that progress in narrowing educational inequalities has ground to halt. While educational standards and overall attainment has been maintained since the previous year (and even increased slightly at secondary school), the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their non-disadvantaged peers has stopped closing. This was the worrying position from which the school system entered the many challenges of the pandemic and lockdown in 2020, which are widely expected to worsen disadvantage gaps.

The gap has now begun to widen across all three phases of education that we consider in this report – the early years, primary school and secondary school. In 2018, the gap widened for the first time in our data at early years and secondary school. In 2019, the gap also widened for the first time at primary school.

We find that the slowing and/or reversal of progress is related to a rise in persistent poverty among disadvantaged pupils. The gap for the most persistently disadvantaged pupils, already twice the size of the gap for the least persistently poor pupils, has increased in every year but one since 2014. This suggests that progress in closing the gap has not trickled down to the most persistently poor pupils.

This year we also provide a time series for the ethnicity, late-EAL and SEND gaps. The results from this are troubling. Since 2011, the gap between pupils from black and White British backgrounds has increased in the order of 60-70 per cent. Meanwhile, the gap for pupils who arrive late into the English state school system with English as an Additional Language (EAL) has widened by 11 per cent. For SEND pupils, there are real signs of stagnation since 2015, as progress in closing the gap for both school support and EHCP pupils has slowed, and even reversed for pupils with the greatest needs. Further research is needed to understand the causes of these gaps more fully.

Meanwhile, for looked after children, children in need and children on a child protection plan, some progress has been made in closing the gap since 2015. However, some of that progress is likely explained by changes in referral thresholds which impact on the composition of the group in question. For looked after children, the progress has been much slower.

Our findings suggest that an urgent emphasis on closing gaps in education is necessary. They are also a timely reminder that efforts to tackle the social determinants of education, such as poverty and trauma during childhood, are a fundamental to reducing educational inequalities.

It is widely expected that the Covid-19 pandemic will increase the disadvantage gap significantly. This, combined with the fact that the gap was already beginning to widen prior to the pandemic, suggests that without targeted government action to close the gap there is a risk of undoing decades of progress in tackling educational inequalities.

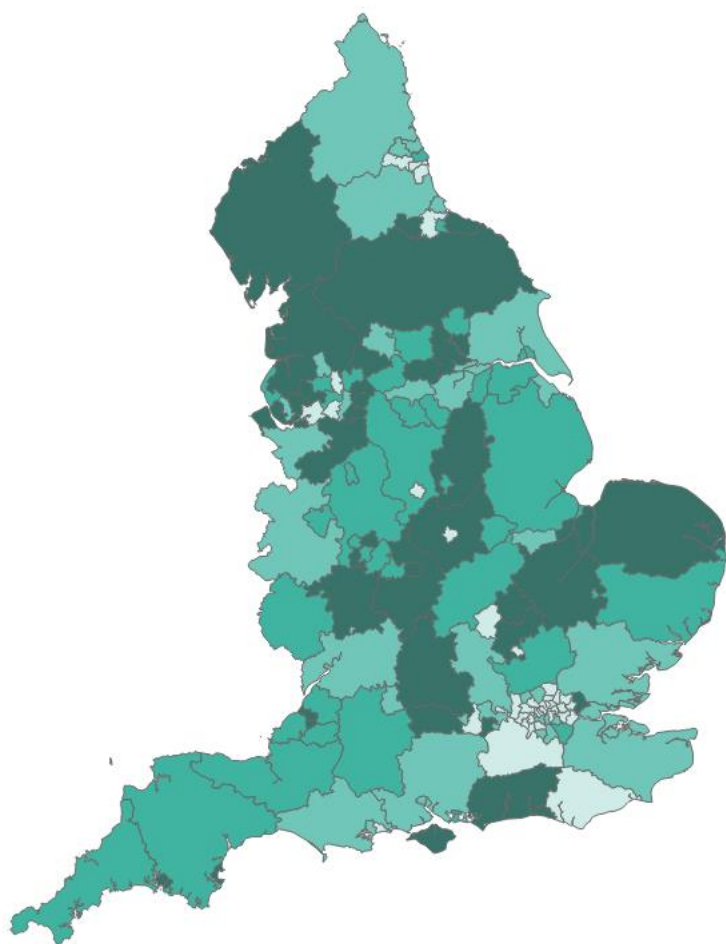
Annex A: Regional Analysis of the Disadvantage Gap

The gap in the early years and primary school

Starting in the early years, the national disadvantage gap in 2019 stood at 4.6 months with some geographical variation across England. In terms of regional school commissioner areas, the West Midlands, Lancashire & West Yorkshire, the South West, and East Midlands & the Humber had an average disadvantage gap of around five months, whilst the East of England & North-East London, North-West London & South-Central England, and South-East England & South London had an average disadvantage gap of around four months. The North of England stood somewhere in between, with an average gap of 4.5 months.

At local authority level (see Figure A1), the gap ranged from 1.5 months in East Sussex to 7.1 months in Wirral. Just over half of local authorities (53%) had a disadvantage gap within one month above or below the national average and there were only 13 cases where the disadvantage gap was greater than six months. These 13 local authorities were: Wirral (7.1 months), Wigan (7.1 months), Dudley (7 months), Nottinghamshire (6.6 months), Central Bedfordshire (6.5 months), West Berkshire (6.5 months), Redcar and Cleveland (6.4 months), Halton (6.4 months), Cambridgeshire (6.4 months), Plymouth (6.4 months), Walsall (6.1 months), Bedford (6.1 months) and Blackpool (6.1 months).

Figure A1. Disadvantage gap for early years in England in 2019



	Smallest 25%	Lower-middle 25%	Upper middle 25%	Largest 25%
Early years - Disadvantage gap	1.5 - 3.6	3.6 - 4.6	4.6 - 5.4	5.4 - 7.1

At the end of primary school in 2019, a pupil from a disadvantaged household is on average 9.3 months behind their peers in school performance or 12.1 months behind if they are persistently disadvantaged. As displayed in Figure A2 below, above average levels of the disadvantage gap span from the South West towards the midlands and eastern regions of England. Meanwhile, lower gaps are concentrated around London and surrounding areas, with 15 of the local authorities with the lowest gaps located in London: Kensington and Chelsea (-0.8 months), Newham (0.8 months), Tower Hamlets (1.1 months), Camden (2.5 months), Westminster (2.7 months), Richmond upon Thames (3.4 months), Hammersmith and Fulham (3.5 months), Waltham Forest (3.6 months), Ealing (2.9 months), Barnet (4.2 months), Brent (4.3 months), Greenwich (4.4 months), Harrow (4.4 months), Redbridge (4.6 months) and Lambeth (5.5 months).

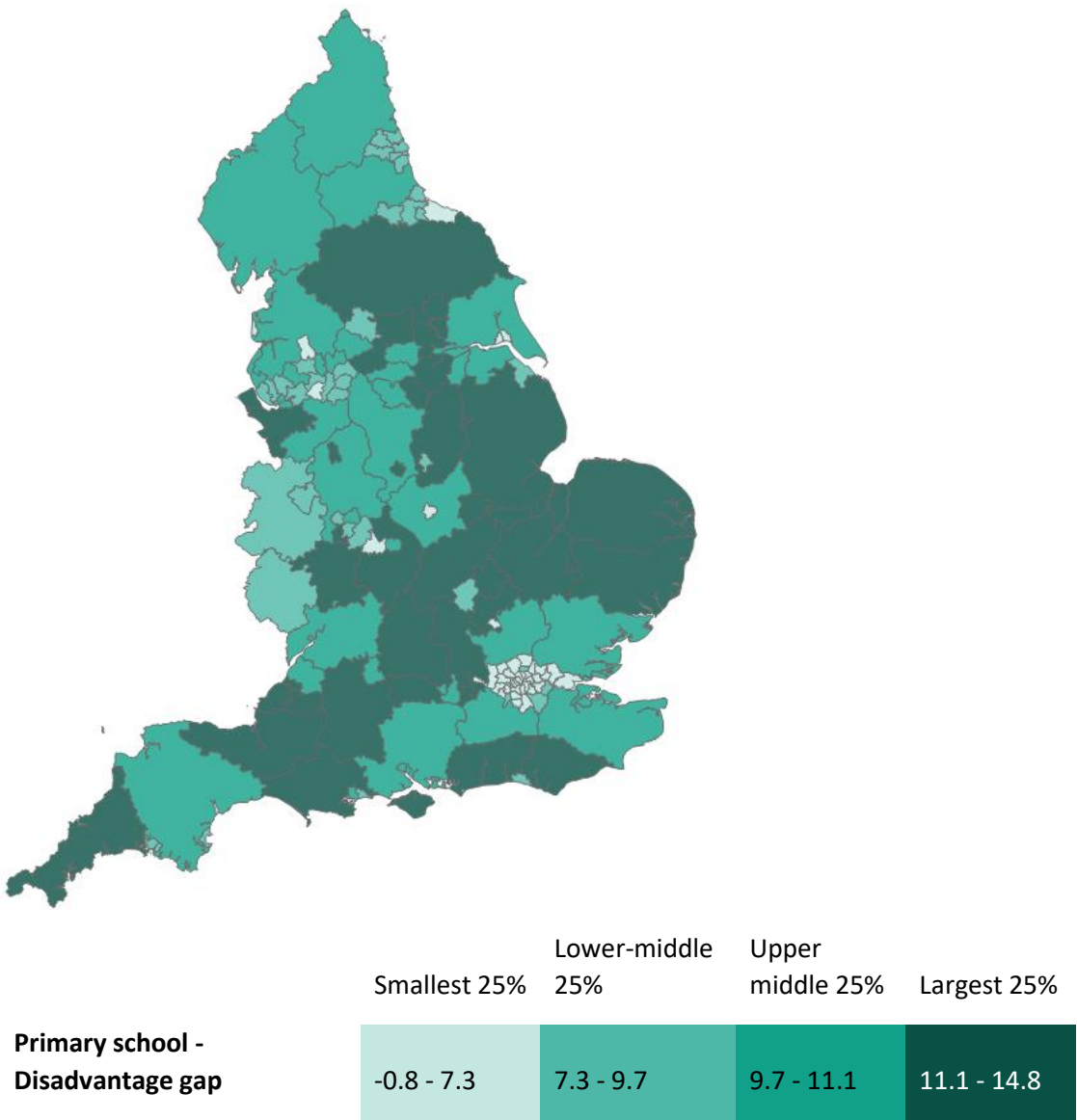
The negative disadvantage gap seen in Kensington & Chelsea represents a situation where, on average, disadvantaged students outperform their peers. However, in this case, it is more likely caused by an atypical demographic make-up and/or low population estimates.

The local authorities with the largest primary disadvantage gaps are Bedford (14.8 months), West Berkshire (13.9 months), Windsor and Maidenhead (13.9 months), Wiltshire (13.4 months), Dudley (13 months), Central Bedfordshire (12.9 months), Cambridgeshire (12.8 months), Peterborough (12.8 months) and Somerset (12.5 months).

Local authorities with a low disadvantage gap tend to have a low persistent disadvantage gap and vice versa: those with a high disadvantage gap generally have a high persistent disadvantage gap. However, in all areas but one (Rutland) the persistent disadvantage gap is larger in magnitude, spanning from 2.2 months in Kensington & Chelsea to 18 months in Windsor and Maidenhead.

The majority of local authorities experience a widening of the gap from early years to the end of primary school. However, there are eight local authorities where the disadvantage gap is smaller at the end of primary school than in the early years: Kensington & Chelsea, Tower Hamlets, Newham, Camden, Redcar and Cleveland, Westminster, Blackpool, and Hammersmith & Fulham.

Figure A2. Disadvantage gap for primary schools in England in 2019



The gap in secondary school

The key stage 4 geographical analysis uses the average maths and English scores to measure performance.

By the end of secondary school, a disadvantaged pupil is on average 18.1 months behind their peers in overall attainment for maths and English – almost double the gap at the end of primary school. For persistently disadvantaged pupils, the national gap is 22.7 months. The gap is largest in the North, West Midlands and parts of the South (Figure A3), whilst the smallest gaps are again concentrated in London and surrounding areas.

At local authority level, the disadvantage gap ranges from 0.5 months in Westminster to 26.3 months in Blackpool. Despite the large range, two thirds of local authorities have a disadvantage gap between 18 to 24 months and only three local authorities have a gap larger than 24 months: Blackpool (26.3 months), Knowsley (24.7 months) and Plymouth (24.5 months).

The local authorities with the smallest disadvantage gaps are all located in London. They are: Westminster (0.5 months), Redbridge (2.7 months), Ealing (4.6 months), Barnet (5.6 months), Newham (5.9 months), Tower Hamlets (5.9 months), Brent (6.9 months), Kensington and Chelsea (7.5 months), Hounslow (8.7 months), and Hammersmith and Fulham (8.8 months).

All local authorities stated above, excluding Hounslow, also have the smallest persistent disadvantage gaps across England. However, each gap is approximately 2.5 months larger on average for persistently disadvantaged pupils.

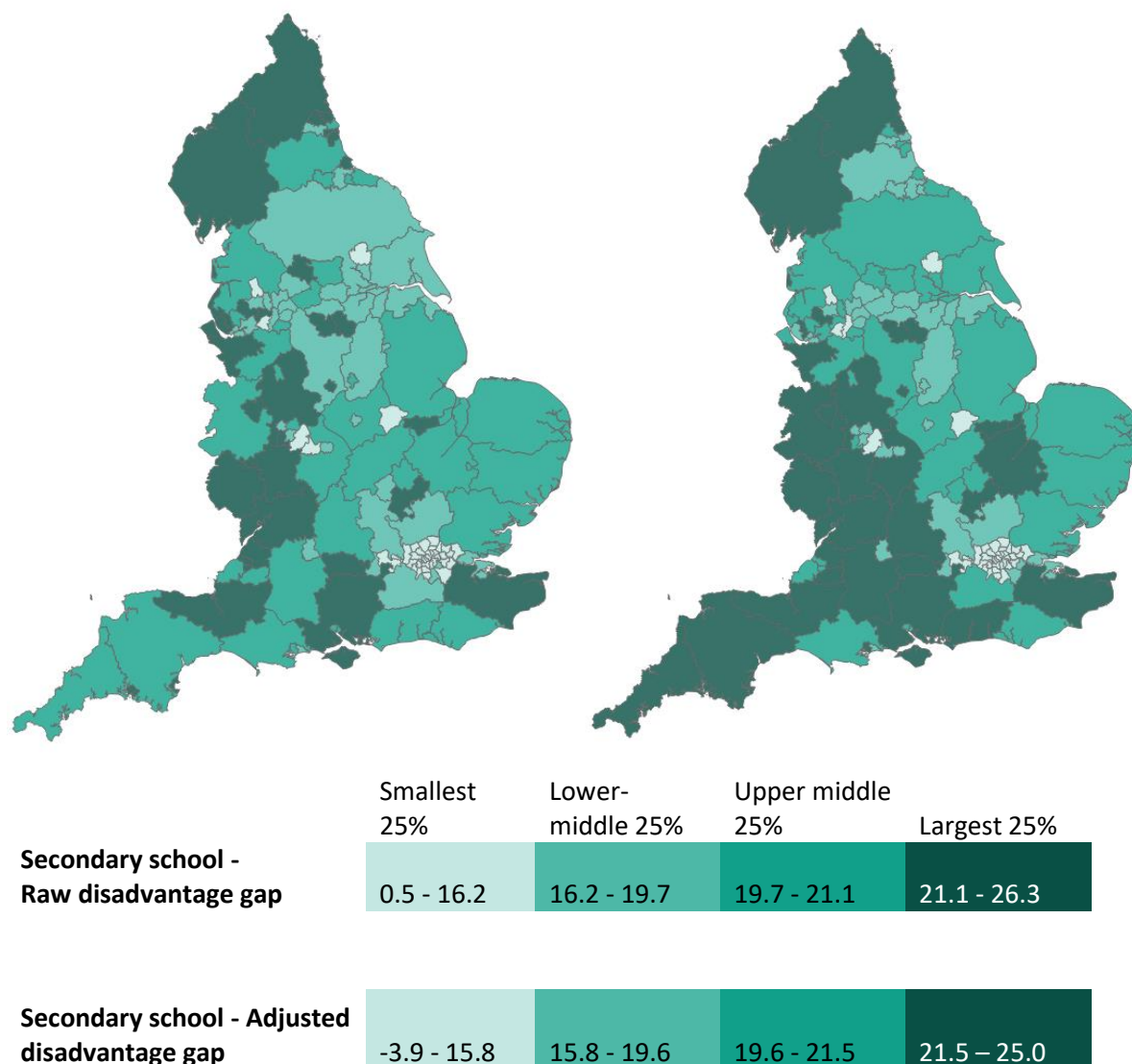
When adjusting for the average persistence of disadvantage in an area, we find that the gap worsens for half of local authorities and improves for the other half. Further details on our methodology can be found in the Technical Appendix.

When comparing the 'raw' and 'adjusted' disadvantage gap, five local authorities saw relatively large improvements in their disadvantage gap after taking account of the level of persistence of poverty in their area. Tower Hamlets had the largest improvement, as the gap decreased by 5.6 months, from 5.9 months to 0.3 months. This was followed by Islington (5.0 months improvement), Hackney (4.1 months improvement), and Camden (4.0 months improvement). These local authorities all have high levels of persistent poverty.

For areas with relatively low levels of persistent poverty, taking account of persistence levels led to a larger adjusted gap – most of all in Rutland, whose gap worsened by 2.3 months. However, this should be interpreted with caution since Rutland is a very small local authority and is therefore more likely to have a homogenous and atypical demographic makeup. This was followed by Wokingham (2.2 months worse), Windsor and Maidenhead (1.9 months worse) and Buckinghamshire (1.9 months worse).

Adjusting for persistence of disadvantage also has an impact on the relative ranking of local authorities. The largest raw gaps, all of which are larger than two years, are in Blackpool, Knowsley and Plymouth. However, when adjusting for persistence of disadvantage, the largest adjusted gaps become more clustered in rural areas with low persistence of poverty (with the exception of Blackpool): the largest adjusted gaps are in South Gloucestershire, West Berkshire, Blackpool and Bracknell Forest. The differences between the smallest raw and adjusted gaps are less notable: these tend to just shuffle around different London local authorities. The smallest raw gaps are in Westminster, Redbridge and Ealing; the smallest adjusted gaps are in Westminster, Tower Hamlets and Redbridge. Tower Hamlets enters this list when adjusting for persistence because it experiences relatively high levels of persistent poverty.

Figure A3. Raw (left) and adjusted (right) disadvantage gap for secondary schools in England



Gap change since 2012

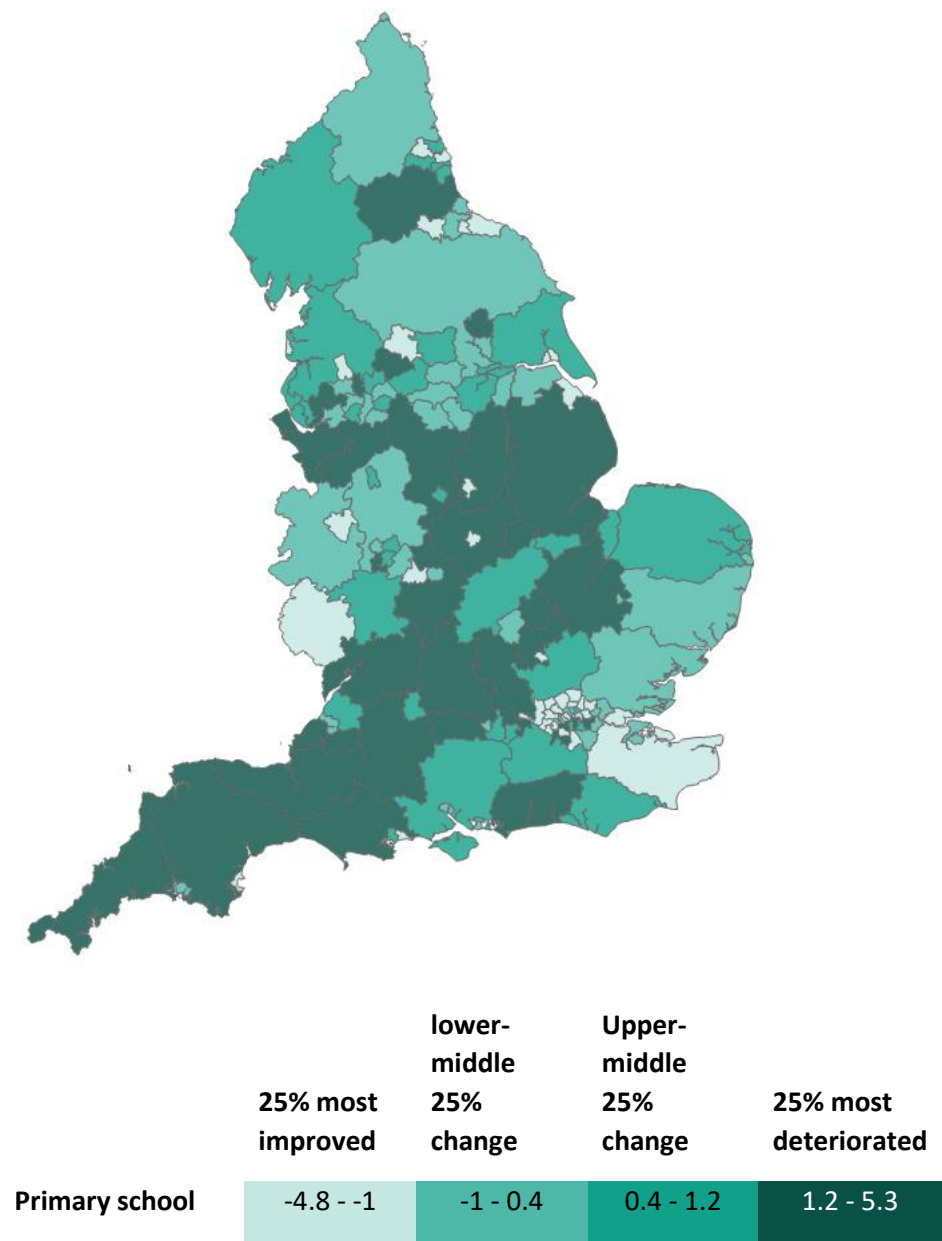
This section looks at how the disadvantage gap has changed since 2012. Each local authority in 2019 is compared with others that had a similar sized gap in 2012, and the reported change in the gap is relative to those with similar starting points. More information on how this is calculated is provided in the Technical Appendix.

In the early years, from 2012 to 2019 approximately 53 per cent of all local authorities experienced a worsening of the gap and 47 per cent saw an improvement. However, the changes were small as 63 per cent of local authorities only saw a change of 1 month since 2012.

The gap at primary school (Figure A4) worsened most across the South West and The Midlands. The largest increases were in Bedford (+5.3 months), Rutland (+4.6 months), and Windsor and Maidenhead (+4.3 months).

A cluster of local authorities around London and the South East of England saw an improvement in the primary gap. Although the largest decrease in the gap was seen in Kingston upon Hull (-4.8 months) in East Yorkshire, followed by Waltham Forest (-4.7 months) and Newham (-4.7 months).

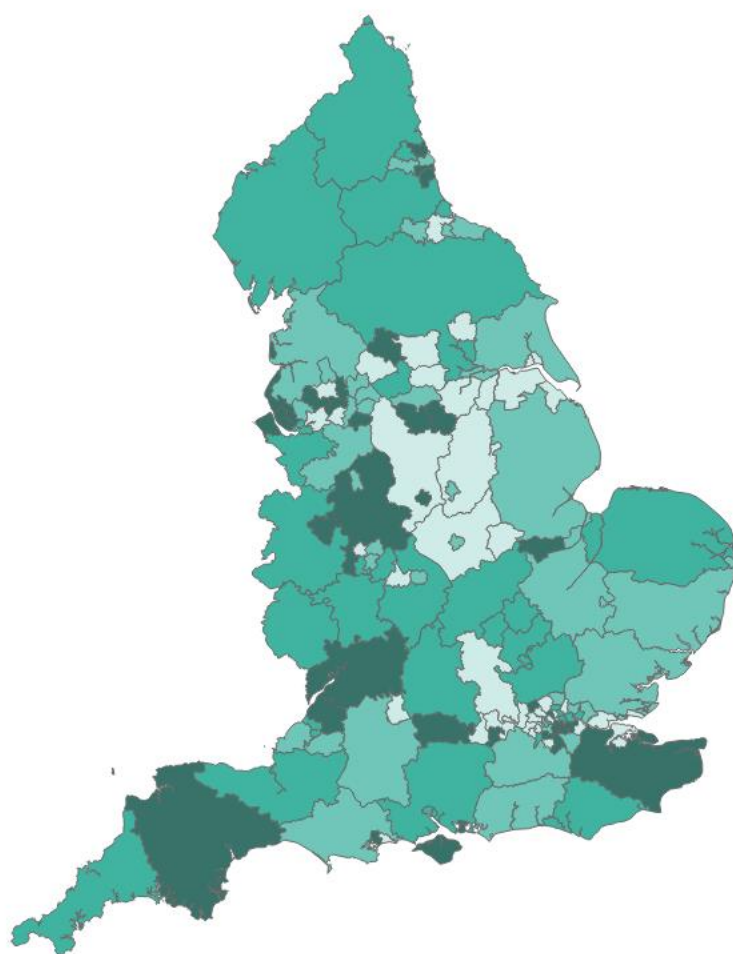
Figure A4. Change in disadvantage gap since 2012 for primary school



At key stage 4, the gap worsened in areas scattered around the South West, North West, and West Midlands (Figure A5) and widened the most in Wirral (+5.2 months), Blackpool (+5 months), Wigan (+4.9 months), Plymouth (+3.9 months) and Greenwich (+3.9 months).

Areas that improved the most since 2012 were clustered around the East Midlands, Yorkshire & the Humber, London and surrounding areas. The biggest improvement was seen in Rutland (-11.5 months), followed by Windsor and Maidenhead (-6.3 months) and Ealing (-5.3 months).

Figure A5. Change in the disadvantage gap since 2012 for secondary schools.



	25% most improved	lower-middle 25% change	Upper-middle 25% change	25% most deteriorated
Secondary school	-11.5 - -0.9	-0.9 - 0	0 - 1.5	1.5 - 5.2

Progress in opportunity areas

The Opportunity Areas programme began in October 2016 with the purpose of improving social mobility in areas that are most in need of additional support. An initial six areas were announced in October 2016 (Blackpool, Derby, Norwich, Oldham, Scarborough and West Somerset), then a further six in January 2017 (Bradford, Doncaster, East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Hastings, Ipswich and Stoke-on-Trent). The programme included a three-year £72m package in an attempt to focus national and local resources to these areas, spread across the education sector from early years to employment.

When considering progress in the Opportunity Areas, it is important to note that the intervention plans for the first wave were published just under two years before the 2019 results used in this report, and the plans for the second wave were published around 1.5 years prior. Keeping the fairly

short time since Opportunity Area plans were agreed in mind, we review the latest results and find a fairly positive picture at Key Stage 2, but mixed results in early years and Key Stage 4.

Note that unlike the previous section, which presents changes in the gap for each area relative to other areas with comparable gaps, all figures in this section refer simply to the absolute change in the gap for each opportunity area from 2016 to 2019.

In the early years, eight opportunity areas saw an improvement in the disadvantage gap while the gap worsened in four areas (Figure A6). West Somerset saw the largest improvement as the gap fell from 4.5 months to 1.5 months, followed by Hastings where the gap fell from 2.7 months to 0.9 months. The disadvantage gaps in Bradford, Derby, Doncaster, East Cambridgeshire, Norwich and Oldham all improved by an average of 0.7 months. In contrast, other opportunity areas saw a slight worsening of the gap from +0.1 months in Fenland to +1.3 months in Blackpool.

At key stage 2, we find a more positive picture as the disadvantaged gap improved in all but three opportunity areas by an average of 2 months from 2016 to 2019, with relatively large improvements in Blackpool (-4.2 months), Hastings (-3.9 months) and Bradford (-3.1 months). The three opportunity areas with worsening gaps were West Somerset (+1.1 months), Fenland (+0.7 months) and East Cambridgeshire (+0.1 months).

The latest findings at key stage 4 presents mixed results. The disadvantage gap fell in seven opportunity areas, rose in five areas, and one area saw no change. Most notably, there was a huge improvement in West Somerset as the gap fell from 27.3 months in 2016 to 9.7 months in 2019 – a change of 17.5 months. However, as the region has a relatively small population, it means small changes to the demographical make-up of the area may have a profound influence on the results.

Six other opportunity areas reduced their respective disadvantage gap at key stage 4 by an average of 2.9 months: Doncaster (-4.0 months), Derby (-3.3 months), Ipswich (-3.3 months), Norwich (-3.1 months), East Cambridgeshire (-2.0 months) and Oldham (-1.9 months).

Bradford saw minimal change over the period as the gap fell from 21.5 months in 2016 to 20 months in 2018, but then bounced back to 21.5 months in 2019 – resulting in no overall change over the period.

Among the remaining five areas, the disadvantage gap increased by an average of 1.4 months from 2016 to 2019. The largest increase was in Scarborough (+3.1 months), followed by Blackpool (+1.7 months), Hastings (+1.1 months), Fenland (+0.8 months) and Stoke-on-Trent (+0.3 months).

Figure A6. Change in disadvantage gap for opportunity areas from 2016 to 2019

	Early Years - gap change from 2016 to 2019	Primary school - gap change from 2016 to 2019	Secondary school - gap change from 2016 to 2019
Blackpool	+1.3	-4.2	+1.7
Bradford	-0.1	-3.1	0.0
Derby	-1.1	-0.4	-3.3
Doncaster	-0.3	-2.1	-4.0
East Cambridgeshire	-0.5	+0.1	-2.0
Fenland	+0.1	+0.7	+0.8
Hastings	-1.8	-3.9	+1.1
Ipswich	0.0	-0.7	-3.3
Norwich	-0.9	-1.9	-3.1
Oldham	-1.1	-2.3	-1.9
Scarborough	+0.7	-1.2	+3.1
Stoke-on-Trent	+0.7	-0.3	+0.3
West Somerset	-3.0	+1.1	-17.6

Annex B: Post-16 Segregation Index

Calculating a disadvantage gap for pupils in post-16 education is more complex than for education at younger ages because there is more variety in the destinations of study and training that pupils can pursue, making it difficult to make clear comparisons between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils. EPI is currently developing a methodology for a post-16 disadvantage gap which will be published later this year.

In the meantime, a post-16 segregation index can be used to capture the extent to which there is equity in post-16 pupil destinations. These destinations include:

- Further education college or other FE
- 6th Form: college or secondary school
- Other education destination (e.g. special schools, independent schools, alternative provision, higher education institutions and post-16 specialist institutions)
- Sustained employment and/or training destination
- Destination not sustained (e.g. those who participated in education or employment for fewer than two terms, or who had no participation and claimed out-of-work benefits).

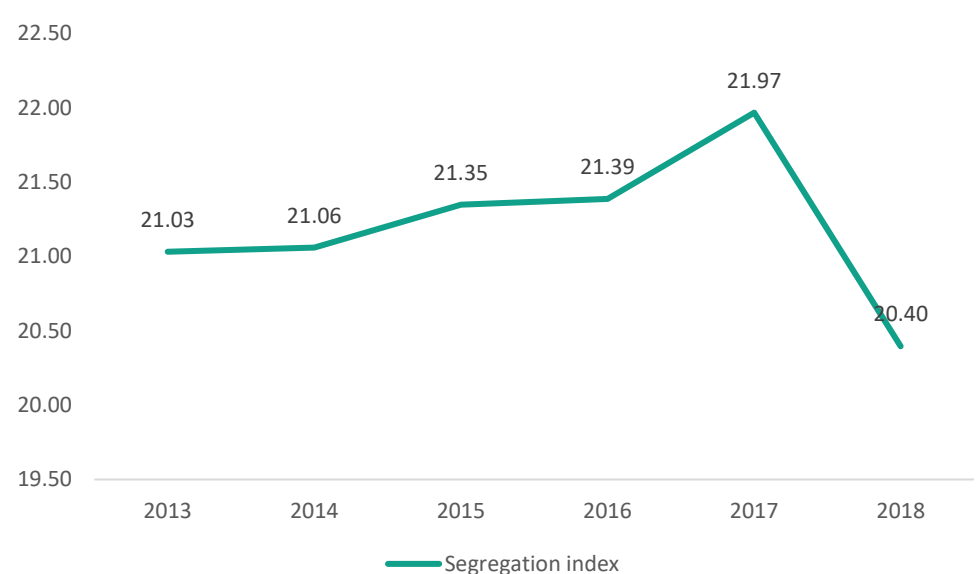
The segregation index enables us to measure the extent to which disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged are clustered in certain destinations. On average, disadvantaged pupils are less likely than non-disadvantaged pupils to stay in education or employment after GCSE, and more likely to attend further education colleges as opposed to school sixth forms or sixth form colleges.

If there were perfect equity in the post-16 system, with disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils being equally likely to pursue any destination, the segregation index would be 0.

In 2018 – the last year for which data is available – the segregation index was 20.4 per cent.

As Figure B1 shows, this marks a 1.6 percentage point decrease on the previous year. This is an outlier from the long run trend of increasing segregation since 2013.

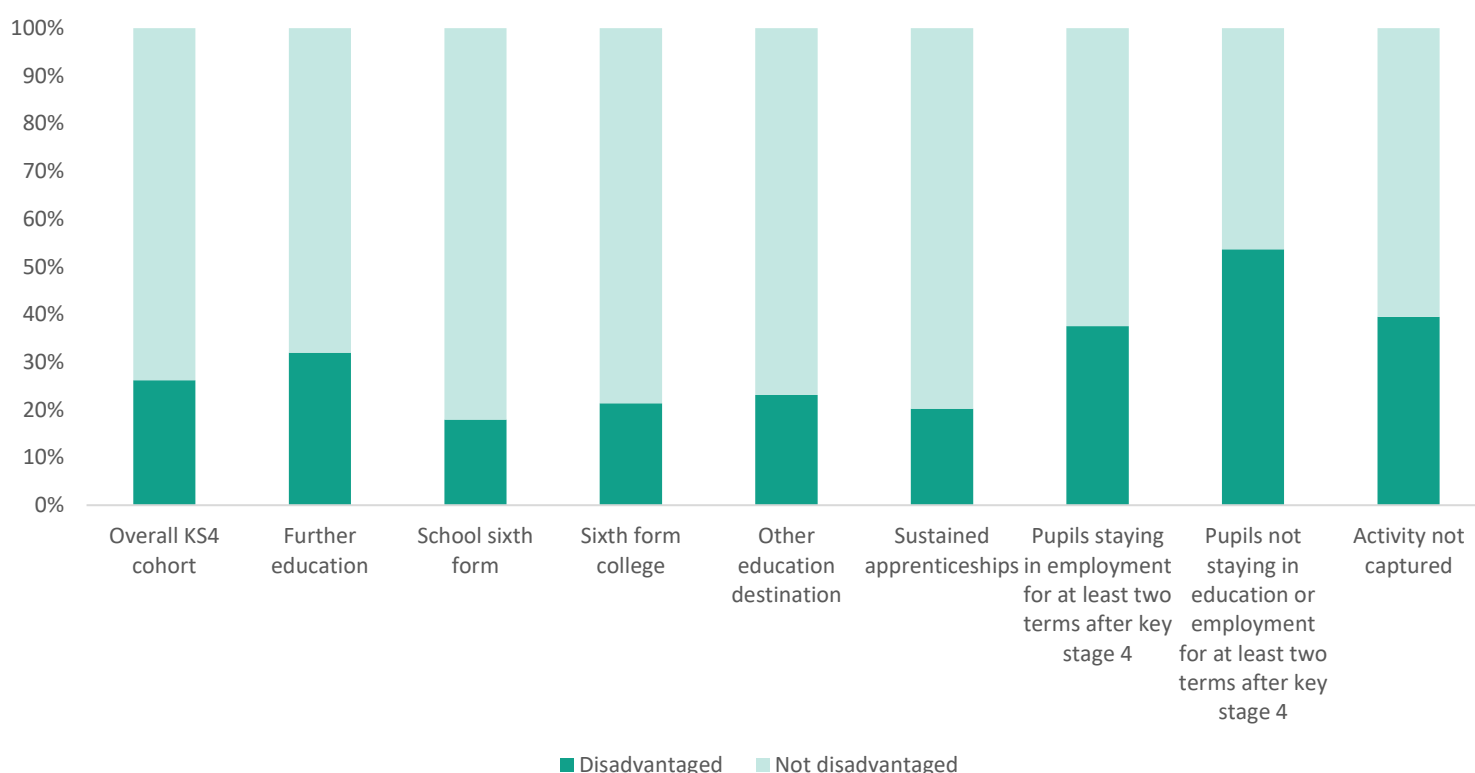
Figure B1: Post-16 segregation index, 2013-2018



Closer investigation suggests that this change is not, however, driven by more disadvantaged pupils accessing more academic destinations, but instead due to the restructuring of post-16 institutions since 2017/18. In particular, the reduction in the segregation index is likely to be driven by the area reviews, which led to some sixth form colleges converting to 16-19 academies and some merging with FE colleges (effectively becoming FE colleges themselves). This has led to a shift away from sixth form colleges towards FE colleges for all pupils, but more so for non-disadvantaged pupils, thus explaining the apparent reduction in segregation.

Whether this data represents a genuine increase in equity is difficult to say. In theory, the restructuring of FE institutions should have led to more mixing between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils. However, it is not clear whether the restructuring will have changed the geographical sites of institutions or their curriculum offers; in practice it may be that segregation between FE and sixth form paths continues within a new merged entity. Further research would be necessary to establish the implications of these changes.

Figure B2: The post-16 destinations of young people by disadvantage in 2018



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